

FEBRUARY 1997

FamilyPC

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Parents' GUIDE TO THE WEB



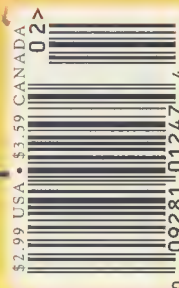
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12 Search Tips • 20 Great Family Sites • Web Phones



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- 15" Micron 15FGx, 28dp (13.7" display)
- Microsoft Office CDs
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- Microsoft Home Pak includes: Works 4.0, Publisher Deluxe, Encarta® Encyclopedia, Monster Truck Madness® and CD sampler
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- Tool-free minitower or desktop
- Microsoft Mouse, 104-key keyboard
- Microsoft Windows® 95 & MS® Plus! CD
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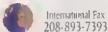
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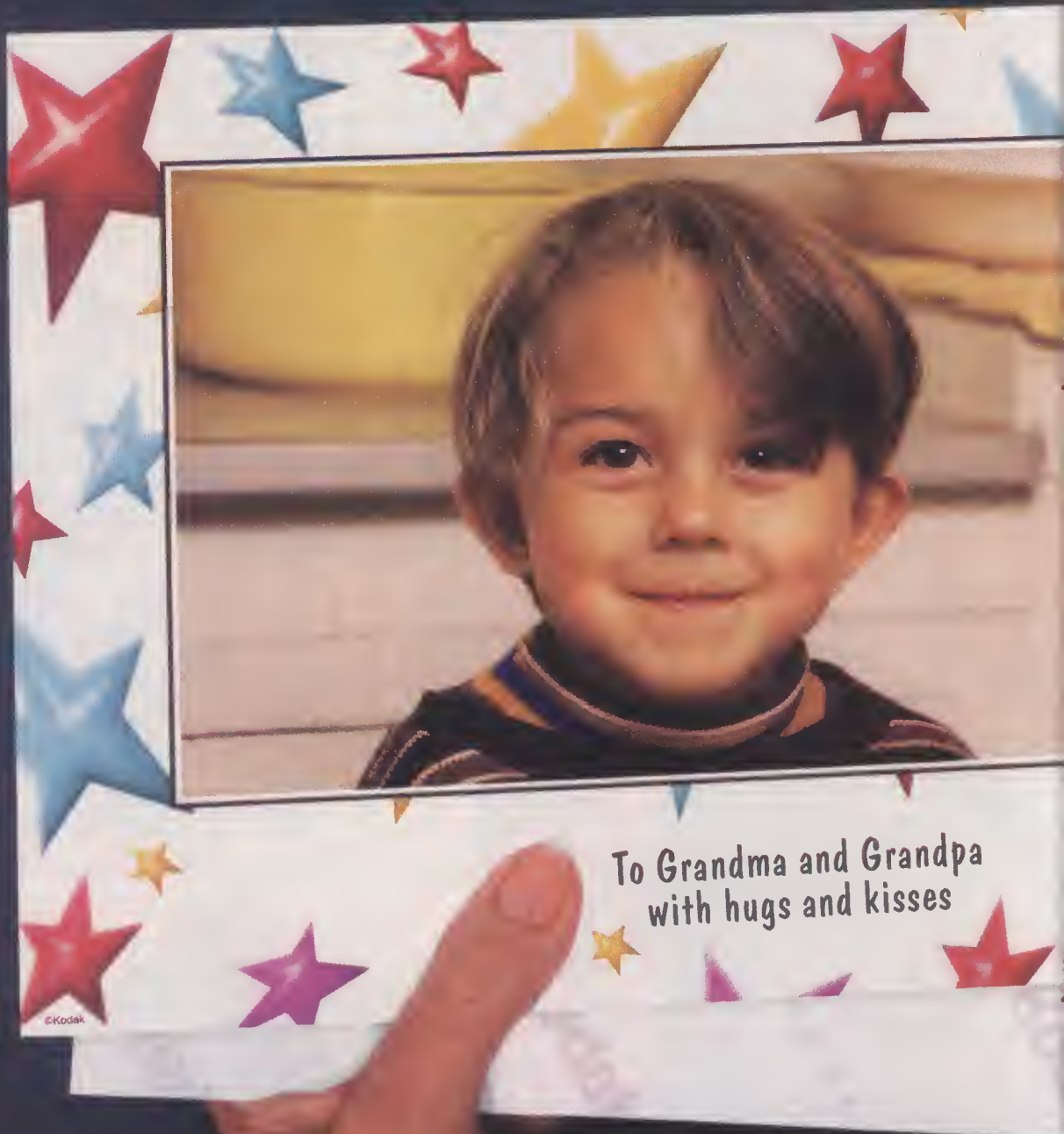
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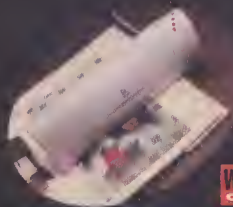
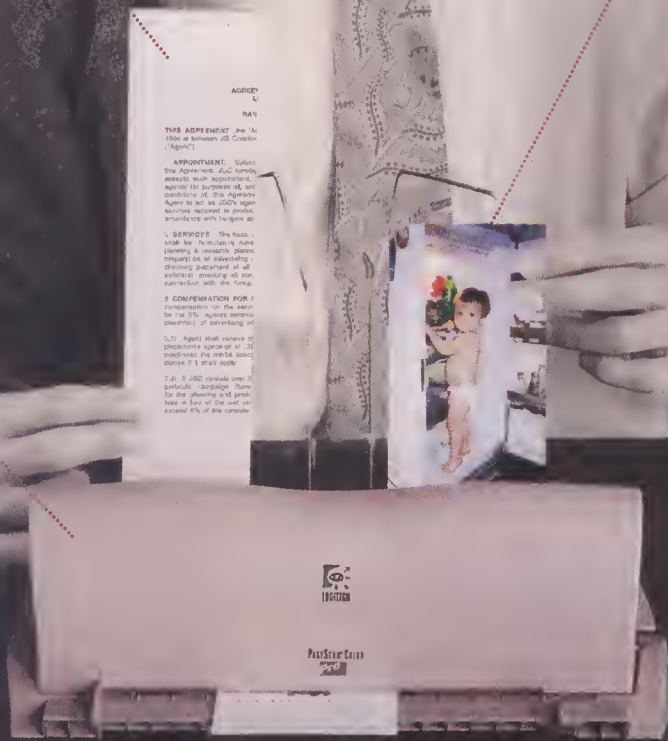
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COVER STORY

42 Parents' Guide to the Web

45 Connect: First Step

What's the best way to the Internet? We weigh the pros and cons of commercial online services and local and national ISPs.

57 Communicate: Reach Out Online

Whether you use e-mail or Web phones, the true beauty of the Internet is that it lets friends and families stay in touch.

63 Collect: Search Smart

If you're lost in a sea of information, *FamilyPC's* Web search tips will help you quickly find only what you are looking for.

75 Create: Family Web Pages

You've seen enough of other people's Web pages — isn't it time you learned how to make your own?

FAMILY TESTED



106 Hardware: Ultimate Game Machines

It takes hot hardware to keep up with today's entertainment software. These four beefed-up PCs are specifically designed to deliver the ultimate game experience.



106



82

82 Software: Photo Magic

We set our testers loose on six photo-editing programs. After they sharpened, cropped, and tweaked their favorite photos, they picked the best program for your family.

Feature

121 Image Capture for Your PC

Before you can add family photos to your cards and invitations, you need to get the images into your PC. To help you make the right choice, we look at the pros and cons of image-capture alternatives: digital cameras, scanners, film-to-disk services, and video-capture devices.



FamilyPC

DEPARTMENTS



UP FRONT

14 From the Editor in Chief

Parenting in an Online Age

Families with a computer and modem are finding new ways to stay in touch.

16 Contest Central

Make music and win software with Maxis's SimTunes. And meet the winner of our notebook giveaway contest.

18 Letters

23 Double Click

Computing's Idealist

Robin Raskin talks with Seymour Papert about families and computers.

26 Savvy Consumer

Fight Junk E-Mail

Deborah Branscum looks at the issues surrounding unwanted e-mail. Yes, you can say No to spam.



FAMILY NEWS

- 33** Intel's MMX processor: A look at what's inside your next multimedia PC; a new desktop-publishing program that separates form from content; there's software in that cereal box; and new family software and hardware.

REVIEWS

129 Hardware

An affordable Apple Performa; a not-so-affordable Apple PowerBook; bargain color ink-jet printers from Canon and NEC; Olympus's new digital camera with a focus on families; competing color scanners from Umax and Logitech.



132 Software

A look at the world of multimedia atlases; a captivating program that combines painting, music, and bugs; an interactive look at the twentieth century; remember the Alamo; Leonardo da Vinci goes digital.

137 Games

Create a mean pinball table with Pinball Builder; help a stranded alien make it home in this Jonny Quest adventure; race in a 4x4 in Test Drive: Off Road.

139 Parental Guidance

Parlez-Vous avec le PC?

Your computer can help you and your kids learn a foreign language.

HELP & ADVICE

142 Professor Poor:
Problem Solver

This month, the professor helps you learn to conserve valuable computer system resources, understand what a zip file is and how you can use one, and discover the secrets of removing duplicate DLLs.



147 Family Shopper

Tips for getting off an online service (it's more difficult than you'd think); and how much time and money does tax software really save?

160 Backspace

Enter our caption contest.

160 Musings

After 15 years, Dan Muse has a revelation about kids' software.

FamilyPC
FOR KIDS

- 151** See how former Power Ranger Walter Jones has made the transition to *Space Cases*. Rock 'n' roll meets computers. Ballet dancers get wired. What's Maui

Mallard — Disney's other duck — quacking about? Plus: Tricks and what's hot.



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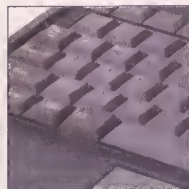
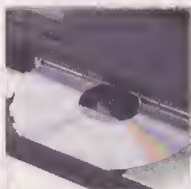
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FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Parenting in an Online Age

FAMILIES ARE FINDING NEW WAYS TO COMMUNICATE

WHEN I WAS A KID, my dad made us sit in front of a reel-to-reel tape player and record our voices every week so that he could send an audiotape off to his brother Bert. Dad marveled at this great technology that let us share our lives much more intimately than we could with paper and pen. We kids, dutifully, but never exactly joyfully, recited the week's events into the microphone. Those tapes are quite precious to me now.

Fast-forward to another era. Recently my family held its first online family reunion. Cousins in Michigan, Massachusetts, Tennessee, New Jersey, and New York logged in to a special chat room on America Online. Dad and Mom sat by my side at the computer, fascinated by the immediacy of it all. Together our family discovered a new way to communicate. The online

experience will give far-flung families like ours the opportunity to keep in touch with an immediacy that's never been possible.

My family is by no means atypical. Every day at *FamilyPC* we hear stories that reaffirm our belief that the online world is dramatically changing our lives. Long-lost relatives are reunited. Schools are sharing ideas with other schools. Grandparents are chatting with their grandchildren. Parents are streamlining volunteer duties like organizing fund-raising using their modems as the conduit for communications.

Regardless of the activity, the refrain is familiar — with a computer and a modem, parents are making another in a series of commitments to creating an enriching, engrossing learning atmosphere for their kids.

Yet there's no denying that the online world is in tumult. Sites come and go so rapidly and content changes so quickly that you can scarcely find the same thing in the same place online twice. This issue of *FamilyPC* is dedicated to helping you deal with that change. Our cover story will give you a groundwork for making the most out of your online efforts.

As ever, the online experience is only part



Robin and Dad For the Raskin family, PCs and modems have replaced tape recorders and the mail.

of what parents need to know about to prepare their children for the information age. In this issue you'll also find a look at the first family computers based on Intel's new MMX processor and advice on how to get offline when your service provider doesn't help you make a graceful exit.

In 1996, computers and the Internet became an almost-unavoidable fact of life. As adults, we can tuck our heads in the sand and hope that our kids get by in this digitized world without us, or we can plunk ourselves down in front of the Internet and help them find the best that's out there. From where we sit at *FamilyPC*, the online adventure is one that you can't afford to miss.

—Robin Raskin
Editor in Chief

Talk to and see people online.
Capture and distort video images.
Edit home movies on your computer.
Obviously, you've got the **Bigpicture™**

Now there's a new way to have fun with your computer. It's called the Bigpicture Video Kit and it's available only from U.S. Robotics.

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The video telephone is no longer a technology of the future. Bigpicture lets you video conference point-to-point or over the Internet,* letting you actually see your friends while you're talking to them. It's all here, right now, in one affordable and easy to use package.

A Whole New Dimension For Your PC

Of course, Bigpicture is more than just a video telephone. It also lets you e-mail video images to your friends and even capture video streams from the Internet. The result is hours of online fun.

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*Other end of connection must also be camera-equipped to see called party. Compatible with any standard H.324 video software. U.S. Robotics and the USRobotics logo are registered trademarks, and VideoFun, Bigpicture and the bigpicture logo, x2 and the x2 logo are trademarks of U.S. Robotics. Product specifications subject to change without notice. Contact your U.S. Robotics representative for current product information. ©1996 U.S. Robotics. All rights reserved.

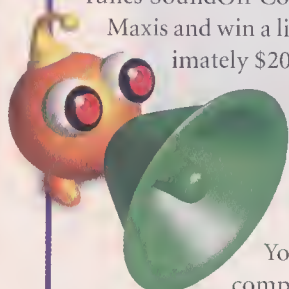
CONTEST CENTRAL

W E W A N T T O H E A R F R O M Y O U

FamilyPC is a place for you and your family to share computer experiences, projects, tips, and questions with families around the country. This month, learn how you can win a library of classic software for kids.

Sound Off to Score Free Software

IF YOU ARE 13 YEARS OLD or younger, join in the Great SimTunes SoundOff Contest to celebrate the latest release from Maxis and win a library of kids' software valued at approximately \$200. Here's how to enter:



1 Think of a sound—maybe it's a Martian singing, or jingle bells ringing. Your sound can be silly, scary, weird, wild, or not even real.

2 Now draw a picture of your sound.

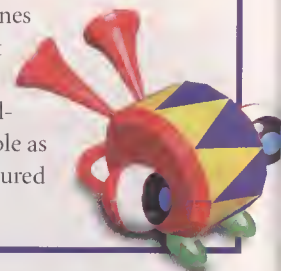
You can use crayon, pencil, paints, or your computer. Just make sure your picture isn't larger than 9 by 12 inches. Also, be sure to write your sound's name on the back.

3 Write your name, address, phone number, and age on a piece of paper. Make sure to tell us whether there is a computer in your home and whether it plays CD-ROMs. Have your parent or guardian sign the paper, too.

4 Mail your entry by February 28, 1997, to:

The Great SimTunes SoundOff
c/o Maxis
2121 North Carolina Blvd.
Walnut Creek, CA 94596-3572

Five grand-prize winners will each receive a library of Maxis software for kids, including award-winning classics such as Widget Workshop, SimTown, and SimPark. No matter what you draw, you get a free SimTunes harmonica if you're one of the first 250 to enter. And everybody who enters gets a free Maxis Software CD Sampler in the mail. SimTunes is a music and art creativity program that provides kids with the tools to make musical pictures. They select from a palette of colors and draw with colored dots that double as musical notes. Winning entries will be featured in the June issue of *FamilyPC*.



Winner of FamilyPC NEC Notebook Giveaway

IN HONOR OF OUR FAMILY notebook story, "Anywhere, Anytime Computing" by Jon Pepper (October 1996 *FamilyTested Hardware*), *FamilyPC* sponsored an essay contest in conjunction with NEC Technologies. The contest was held at our America Online site (FamilyPC@aol.com) and invited folks to tell us in 250 words or less "why my family can't live without a notebook computer."

Heather Norcom, of Nevada, won her family an NEC 2405CD, valued at \$2699. She wrote

her essay on behalf of her husband John, who is a firefighter, EMT, instructor, and student. She says he must do homework, college papers, and lesson plans on paper while at the station, where he often pulls several 24-hour shifts in a row due to personnel shortages. Then, he must reenter the work on the family computer at home and get final printouts. "A notebook would save him from doing the work twice," wrote Heather, who also has three children, Jonathan, 9 (not pictured); Samantha, 3; and Nichole, 5 months. Congratulations!



FamilyPC for Kids Wants You

IF YOUR CHILD does neat tricks on your family's computer or has a favorite Web site, have him tip us off. And if your young gamer would like to write a review or your child uses a computer for creative projects, let us know. *FamilyPC* for Kids will publish the best ideas, questions, and jokes we get, and its Kids' Corner section features kids who use computers in cool ways.

Write to *FamilyPC* for Kids, 244 Main St., Northampton, MA 01060. Fax: 413-582-9070. AOL: E-mail to screen name FamilyPC. Include a daytime phone number. For every idea we use, we'll send out a *FamilyPC* for Kids surprise.

And don't forget to visit us online at www.yahooligans.com/content/fpc/.



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Finding the right home PC can be difficult. That's why we're here to help you choose from our wide range of PCs. Take the Aptiva S Series model above, for example. Its unique split-system design saves space by putting the 8X CD-ROM and disk drives within reach and the mini tower

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LETTERS

Desperately Seeking Index

I've enjoyed your magazine since your first issue, but you desperately need a cumulative product index. Not every issue has an index, and the table of contents does not list every product reviewed. Back issues would be

FamilyPC ON THE WEB

worth a lot more if there were an easy way to find that review of a particular game, for instance.

Gerald C. Gladstone
Worcester, Massachusetts

FamilyPC editors reply: At our Web site, www.familypc.com, up to 12 months' worth of hardware and software reviews are available via a search engine.

Is That a Bug?

I have discovered a bug in the newest version of Quicken 6 for Windows: Certain installs into directories with long names will not interface properly with the Checkfree system. Why would Intuit release a new version without the capability for users of the Checkfree service to install Quicken with directory names of more than eight characters?

Andrew Schwaeber
New York, New York

Intuit's Quicken Team responds: The problem Mr. Schwaeber refers to has been fixed, and an update will be available via Quicken Live soon (by press time). Quicken Live is a collection of Internet-based services that allows Intuit to update Quicken at any time, adding new program features as well as keeping the software current and relevant to customers' financial needs. Access is free and available online. Checkfree users can also call technical support at 505-896-7228, Monday through Friday, 6 A.M. to 6 P.M. Mountain Time.

Big Business versus Small Customers

We live in a small rural community. We do not have a local access number available to us for any of the Internet service providers (ISPs) and therefore must incur long-distance charges or 800-number surcharges to access the Internet. Retired and living on a fixed income, we are not able to afford the

use of ISPs in our area. If it wasn't for Juno's free e-mail service and 800 number without surcharge, we wouldn't even be able to use the e-mail aspect of the Internet. Why wouldn't a giant such as America Online or CompuServe or any of the other nationwide ISPs waive the surcharges for those of us who have no other way to access the Internet? I would happily pay the monthly fees to use their services, but I will not spend another \$6 to \$10 an hour to use their 800 number. Are corporate profits that important?

James M. Todd
Foxburg, Pennsylvania

Retail versus Mail Order

I was disturbed to read the article in *FamilyPC Shopping Secrets* (Winter 1997) that advocates using mail order over retail when purchasing computer equipment. Gregg Keizer writes, "You can get the best of both worlds — the prices of mail order and the hands-on experience of retail — by checking out the system you want in a retail outlet and then actually buying it by mail order." First of all, I don't believe that is truly in the customer's best interest, from a macroeconomics point of view (keeping the local economy that pays their wages alive and well) to one of genuine customer service (some of us retailers care about service).

I am the sales manager for one of the most successful independent computer retailers in the Prince Albert area of Canada. We have built our reputation on our customer service, including giving customers the most up-to-date components they request on the machine they want. Excellent value and pricing are part of our customer service, in line with mail-order prices.

James E. Turner
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada



Enough Windows 95 Already

I'm a long-term subscriber who feels you've been putting in a lot of articles on Windows 95 but few on Windows 3.1 and DOS 6.2. I like articles on the latter because that is what I am using. I would like to see more tips and hints on Windows 3.1 and DOS 6.2.

Jeffrey Degree
Morrisville, Vermont

In your November 1996 issue on games, you say, "There isn't any reason for developers to still write for DOS now that Windows 95 is here. In next year's roundup, we won't test any DOS games." Nowhere do you describe your panel of testers, but it's obviously heavily biased toward Windows 95 users.

Don Greenwood
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

FamilyPC editors respond: Our panel of more than 2000 game testers was recruited through *FutureKids* and via the Internet. There are no

requirements beyond having a family and a computer. We didn't ask testers which operating system they use, but we assume many of them use Windows 95 since it has been out for more than a year, is quite stable, and offers many benefits for families over Windows 3.1 and DOS.

Our testers were clear about their problems with DOS games, and we believe their experiences reflect those of other families.



Homework Pays Off

Dan Muse's column "Beware, Be Wary" (*Musings, Shopping Secrets*, Winter 1997) was excellent. If I had not researched my choices and networked with people that had PC savvy, I would have probably bought the first computer that sounded good. I ended up spending more than I anticipated but am satisfied with my choices. Your article will help save a lot of families grief, time, and money.

Terie Harper
Louisville, Kentucky

Correction

The correct model number for the Compaq Presario discussed in "The Latest Looks" (December 1996 *FamilyTested Hardware*, page 74) is 3020.

Joystick.

Joy, as in fun to drive. Stick, as in Dodge Stratus' available AutoStick® transmission.

AutoStick is an automatic transmission that can be shifted like a manual. But since AutoStick works without a clutch, you work less and play more. Drop Stratus' gear selector into AutoStick mode and you're in control. Push one way to upshift, the other way to downshift. Hold gears longer for better

acceleration, use the engine for braking, or knock it down a gear to set up for that corner. In brief: enjoy.

Of course Stratus offers other good stuff to help keep the adrenaline level up. Like race-bred, modified double-wishbone suspension, the road-holding stability of

cab-forward design and a 2.5 liter six-cylinder engine that is included on AutoStick-equipped models.

That's a lot to like. In fact, Stratus is so likeable that in J.D. Power and Associates latest APEAL StudySM, Stratus tied as the "Most Appealing Entry Mid-Size Car."*

Stratus comes complete and ready to play. Joystick not required, but highly recommended.

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*1996 Automotive Performance, Execution, and Layout Study, based on 25,492 consumer responses.



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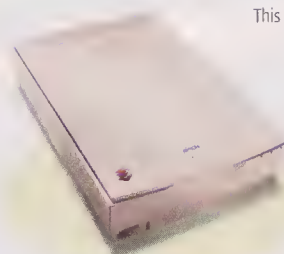
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ACTIONSCANNING™ SYSTEM II



This versatile scanner gives you the power to capture full-size color documents with images. And turn pages of text into files you can edit. Basically, everything you need to create an impactful business document. Or a groovy birthday card. That's a lot of power for around \$349.

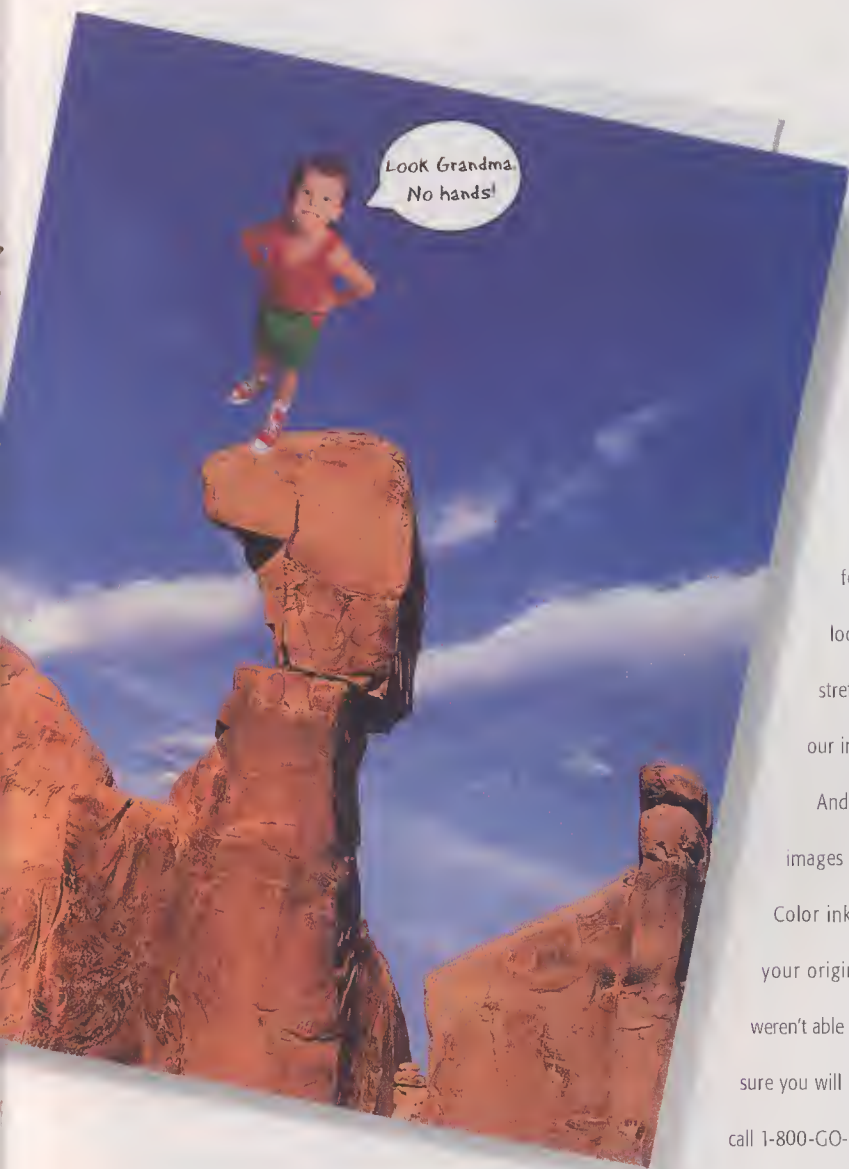


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COMPUTING'S Idealist

A CHAT WITH SEYMOUR PAPERT,
AUTHOR OF *THE CONNECTED FAMILY*

IN 1980, SEYMOUR PAPERT, then a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, wrote *Mindstorms: Children, Computers and Powerful Ideas*. The book presents Papert's ideas about the way children learn — they learn by doing.

These same ideas fueled him to create Logo, a kid-friendly computer programming language that, despite being 15 years old, is still an important programming environment for children (The Logo Foundation, 212-579-8028). Papert, now the Lego Chair at MIT, is an oft-quoted source on kids and education, and on kids and computers in particular.

I recently caught up with Papert to discuss his latest book, *The Connected Family: Bridging the Digital Generation Gap* (Longstreet Press, \$22.95). The book urges parents not to get left behind in the digital revolution and to become involved in their children's computing adventures. On another level, this book is about parents and children connecting with one another as much as with the computer.

Whether or not you agree with Papert's views, there's no denying he has thought long and hard about parents, kids, and computers. Here's what he had to say on some

of the key subjects relevant to today's computing families:

On the Digital Generation Gap

"There has always been a generation gap, but it has been exacerbated by new media like television that allowed children to deviate from having a strong connection with their parents," Papert said.

of children becoming more independent of their parents in their exploration of the world and it will be far more likely to happen for the worse if parents act like cyberostriches, putting their heads in the sand in denial of the changes in the learning environment."

On Kids' Edutainment Software

When I asked Papert what he thought of kids' software, he said things could be much better.

"There's a powerful industry that pulls in the direction of doing mindless things. It's easier to throw money at attracting eyeballs than at attracting minds," he said. "Bad software gives the power to the machine, not the child."

He chastised companies that try to deceive kids with what I'll call *stealth learning*—lessons hidden inside entertainment and games — because it suggests having fun and learning are separate and incompatible processes. Papert argues strongly that learning is better

done consciously and knowingly.

On Computing as a Social Activity

Whether or not learning on the computer is wrapped in engaging games, it seems to



In his book, Papert coins the term *cyberostriches* to refer to parents who'd rather not deal with the sweeping changes in communication technologies: "I am worried about the psychological and spiritual consequences

DOUBLE CLICK

be an individual activity — one child, one computer. Do computers actually hinder children's social skills by encouraging them to work alone? Papert does not think so. "If you've seen kids with computers, you know that there's no better catalyst to share ideas," he said. "It's a much more socializing experience than either school, which isolates

kids, or television, which doesn't encourage any socialization. The computer encourages kids to have conversations with one another."

On Schools and Home Schooling

Papert points out that there are many more computers in homes than in schools, which

means that an increasing number of students spend more time on computer-supported learning activities at home than at school. He sees families who are using their family PC and software for learning at home as a major source of pressure for educational reform — pressure that will result in school reforms that may lead to breakthroughs in teaching and learning. As a result, "the really courageous schools might throw their curriculum out altogether and create an environment where kids can really think and do," he said.

Schools are being pressured to change by several other forces as well: large corporations that want new curricula to help educate a new generation of employees; adults who expect learning to be a lifelong experience; and, finally, children themselves, who have become more powerful voices in education. And the personal computer, Papert claims, is in part responsible for all of these pressures.

Papert believes that home schoolers, because they tend to think more about learning than most parents, have a great deal to offer in terms of their knowledge and enthusiasm about education. He also believes that the Internet in particular can help both public schools and home schoolers share references and learn from one another.

To Our Readers

Papert argues all his points with passion and conviction. But he argues none more emphatically than this: Whether they have a brand-new multimedia computer with all the bells and whistles, an old Apple II with only a few software programs on 5.25-inch floppy disks, or no computer at all, parents must realize that bridging the digital generation gap takes time. It takes shared time, parents and kids together, exploring the new educational possibilities offered by the digital world.

When I asked Papert what he could share with *FamilyPC* readers in particular, he said: "My whole book is advice to the readers of *FamilyPC*. The book might very well have been named *FamilyPC and Learning*, because that's really what it's about. It's about much more than computers." To borrow a phrase that guides me in writing this column, Papert's book is about parenting in high-tech times.

Robin Raskin is editor in chief of *FamilyPC*. E-mail her at robin_raskin@zd.com.

PAPERT on Software

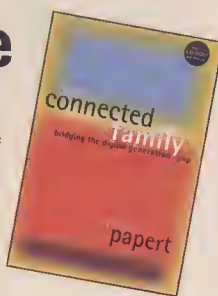
Key questions are your guide to good software

Seymour Papert, Lego professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is not in love with software for its own sake, but rather with software that gives children a chance to explore and grow. Here are his personal criteria for selecting sound software:

- **Is the toy running the child, or is the child running the toy?** Papert does not like software that treats children as if they were answering machines, learning facts without skills. The best learning comes at some effort, not disguised as a game.
- **Is there room for fantasy-making, make-believe, and imagination as well as facts and skill?** Logo and its more recent descendant, MicroWorlds (The Logo Foundation, 212-579-8028), are good examples of how you can learn facts while you're in a make-believe environment.
- **Is there something to share?** Good examples are software programs that let you make a picture, a card, or a project.
- **Try it before you buy it.** If after 5 minutes you can't understand anything about what's going on — that's bad. But if after 5 minutes you can understand everything, that's worse.

In *The Connected Family*, Papert uses Netscape Navigator (www.netscape.com; 415-937-3777), MicroWorlds, and Logo as examples of the kind of software with which you can do things. They are open-ended and, as such, are "good constructivist tools" — tools that let children discover things for themselves rather than spoonfeed them facts.

"The scandal of education," Papert said, "is that every time you teach something you deprive a child of the pleasure and benefit of discovery."



RASKIN Responds

Papert's ideals are worthy of consideration by parents

Papert definitely takes the high road when it comes to families and computers, but it's a road that most parents, with the time constraints placed on them, will find hard to navigate. While families should strive to follow Papert's lead and get involved with their children and with open-ended software tools, as well as with a total understanding of the PC from programming to troubleshooting, I suspect few of us have that sort of time or commitment.


I also believe that simple edutainment titles that drill on certain subject areas, from learning about fractions to practicing a foreign language to doing spelling drills, have their place in this world. And despite our noblest intentions, kids, like parents, need to find a little mindless relaxation now and then. Kids brought up with rapid-fire media and thrilling toys will expect some of the same sensations from their computers. And, realistically, all of us resort to electronic baby-sitter activities now and then.

Surely the world needs people like Seymour Papert who refuse to stop dreaming about the best that PCs have to offer. But he offers only the high end of the scale. It's up to each one of us to find where we stand in relation to that ideal — and not to be too hard on ourselves when we stray from it.

DEAR MOM
I'M GOING ON A HOT AIR
BALLOON RIDE AND THEN PLAY
WITH A DRAGON. I'LL BE HOME
FOR DINNER. I HOPE. LOVE,
MICHAEL



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BY NOW, MOST OF US with a modem and an e-mail account understand all too well the meaning of *spam*, also called junk e-mail. It's hard to ignore these unsolicited commercial messages pouring into our mailboxes. Some bulk e-mail trumpets its intentions directly, with titles such as "Serious Income Invitation" or "Free Gift." Others leave the subject line blank or use a coy "Hi" to get you to read the message. And when you do open such spam, you're likely to find a message that says "Turn \$110 into \$17,000 in 3 weeks" or that promises a hot new Web site for "fun-loving adults."

Receiving that type of e-mail was anything but fun to Mark J. Welch of Pleasanton, California. The attorney joined America Online in October 1995 and quickly became fed up with wading through and paying for the time required to deal with all the junk e-mail and chain letters that began clogging his inbox almost immediately. Despite many complaints to AOL, the junk e-mail kept coming—and from the same companies and services Welch had complained about earlier.

"What really got to me was the volume of it and the

fact that AOL refused to do anything," Welch said. "I wondered why a company would run its business this way. Then I realized they were making money at it, all at the expense of the customer." Welch believed the company profited from the time required for members to deal with junk e-mail. So the attorney went public in March by establishing a Web site (ca-probate.com/aol_junk.htm) that protested AOL and told people how to fight spam. In July, with no progress in sight, Welch canceled his AOL account and moved on to another online service.

AOL on the Case on Spam

While Welch was giving up on AOL, the company was fighting junk e-mailers, according to David Phillips, associate general counsel for AOL. In January 1996, for example, AOL sent a letter to Philadelphia-based Cyber Promotions (see "Super Spammer Changes Tactics") asking it to stop sending AOL members mass, unsolicited e-mail. AOL later filed suit against the company. Phillips denied that AOL profits from junk e-mail and as a result was slow to respond to complaints.



Super Spammer Changes TACTICS

Sanford Wallace is the most notorious commercial spammer in cyberspace. As founder and president of the Philadelphia-based Cyber Promotions, Wallace has sent millions of unsolicited e-mail messages advertising products and services. AOL, CompuServe, Prodigy, SprintNet, and Concentric Networks are suing Wallace's company for a variety of reasons (two of them allege fraud), according to Interactive Week. Wallace denies any wrongdoing.

A common practice among spammers is to use phony return addresses, which can be a headache for online services and ISPs. AOL's David Phillips said Cyber Promotions sent bulk mail that appeared to come from an aol.com address. AOL and other services fought back by blocking all messages sent to their members from Cyber Promotions.

Wallace filed suit against AOL, saying the company violated his First Amendment rights. Not so fast, said a federal judge in Philadelphia, who was still considering the case at press time. In a partial summary judgment, the court ruled that Cyber Promotions does not have a constitutional right to send unsolicited e-mail advertisements over the Internet to members of AOL, a private, commercial online service.

Under an onslaught of criticism, Cyber Promotions has changed its practices. The company now adds people to its 1.4-million-name mailing list only if they actively subscribe to the list at the company's Web site (www.cyberpromo.com), according to Wallace.



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SAVVY CONSUMER

"AOL has always looked at revenue and profitability over the long term, which depends on the loyalty of the members staying with us," said Phillips, who added that AOL is determined to try to protect its members from unwanted junk e-mail. "Junk e-mailers are able to shift the costs of their business to the recipient of the mail and the recipient's network providers, and that makes junk e-mail very different from regular mail. The whole scheme of shifting the costs makes it unfair."

At the height of their unhappiness, AOL members were filing thousands of complaints weekly about junk e-mail. In September, AOL added Mail Controls, which let AOL customers play e-mail cop on their own. (Several Internet e-mail programs, including Eudora and Claris E-mailer, also let you filter your mail by using keywords or e-mail addresses to automatically file or delete messages.) The master account holder can block e-mail from specific addresses to any of the screen names held on the account (Keyword Mail Controls). But apparently the complaints kept coming, so in late October AOL introduced its PreferredMail feature, which automatically blocks all incoming e-mail from specific addresses that members have complained about. (Members can also choose to receive e-mail from those addresses.)

The benefits of PreferredMail may be somewhat transitory, since spammers can quickly set up new e-mail accounts that are not blocked and resume sending bulk e-mail to members again, at least until the complaints

add up and the new account is also blocked. Still, AOL's Phillips reports that complaints about spam have dropped significantly since message blocking went into effect.

AOL members have also gotten relief from the automatic sales ads they are often greeted with after logging on to the service. Folks who don't want to whip out a credit card to buy a new special pop-up offer every other day



IF YOU USE E-MAIL, YOU ARE A POTENTIAL TARGET FOR UNSOLICITED MESSAGES.

can opt out (Keyword Marketing Preferences; click on "Tell Us What Your Pop-Up Preferences Are").

Take a Bite Out of Spam

If you use e-mail, you are a potential target for unsolicited messages, whether you use an Internet-only account or a proprietary online service such as AOL, CompuServe, or Prodigy. Each online service has its own procedure for responding to junk e-mail. AOL, for example, requests that members who are unhappy about receiving a piece of mail forward messages to TOSEmail1 or, if that mailbox is full, to TOSEmail2 with their complaints. If many complaints are received about a particular bulk mailing, AOL can block the source of that mail with its PreferredMail feature.

Several Web sites are devoted to follow-

ing and fighting the junk e-mail trend. The best include Stop Junk Email (www.mcs.com/~jcr/junkemail.html), which includes A Victim's Primer of ways to combat the phenomenon and many news articles tracing the development and unfortunate proliferation of junk e-mail. Get That Spammer (kryten.eng.monash.edu.au/gspam.html) calls itself "a tool for tracking down junk e-mailers, junk news posters, and their Internet service providers." I Hate Junk E-Mail (members.aol.com/tomraynor/junkemail.htm) also offers advice and news on cop-

ing with commercial spammers. (One new commercial site, Zero Junk Mail at www.zerojunkmail.com, says it will contact thousands of marketing firms to request that your name be removed from telemarketing, junk mail, and junk e-mail lists. The company claims you can expect a 75 percent reduction in solicitations for its \$15 annual fee.)

Most anti-spam sites recommend that you ask to have your name removed from a mailing list if you receive annoying junk e-mail. If that doesn't work, complain to your service, complain to any businesses being advertised by the bulk e-mail (try calling any handy 800 numbers to vocalize your concern), and then complain to the Internet service provider used by the bulk e-mailer. Determining exactly who that is can be tricky, since bulk e-mail may be sent out with a false return address. (Get That Spammer can help you unravel the mysteries of the true origin of the e-mail.)

If that sounds like too much work and your e-mail filter isn't catching enough spam, you can simply delete any messages from addresses you don't recognize. Some anti-spam activists believe that ignoring junk e-mail simply encourages more. But simple deletion may be the easiest way for busy families to deal with this annoying aspect of cyberspace. In the meantime, some activists point out that sending unsolicited commercial faxes is against the law and are lobbying for similar legislation that would outlaw junk e-mail.

E-mail Deborah Branscum at branscum@aol.com. Individual responses may not be possible given the volume of mail she receives.

Break the CHAIN

Chain letters have not improved in their transition from paper to cyberspace. They're still annoying and often illegal. Anyone who transmits a message asking for money or something of value and promises that you'll make big bucks once your name gets to the top of the list is participating in a form of gambling. And it's against the law if the U.S. mail is used in any step of the scheme, such as an e-mail message that asks you to mail money to an address.

The United States Postal Inspection Service notes that some messages that purport to sell services are actually chain letters. "Do not be fooled if the chain letter is used to sell inexpensive reports on credit, mail order sales, mailing lists, or other topics. The primary purpose is to take your money, not to sell information," advises the service on its Web site (www.usps.gov/websites/depart/inspect/chainlet.htm).

The messages that don't ask for money but urge you not to break the chain for fear of bad luck are sent by thoughtless folks preying on your time. Don't just break the chain — stomp on it by forwarding it to the e-mail cops mentioned in the Take a Bite Out of Spam section.



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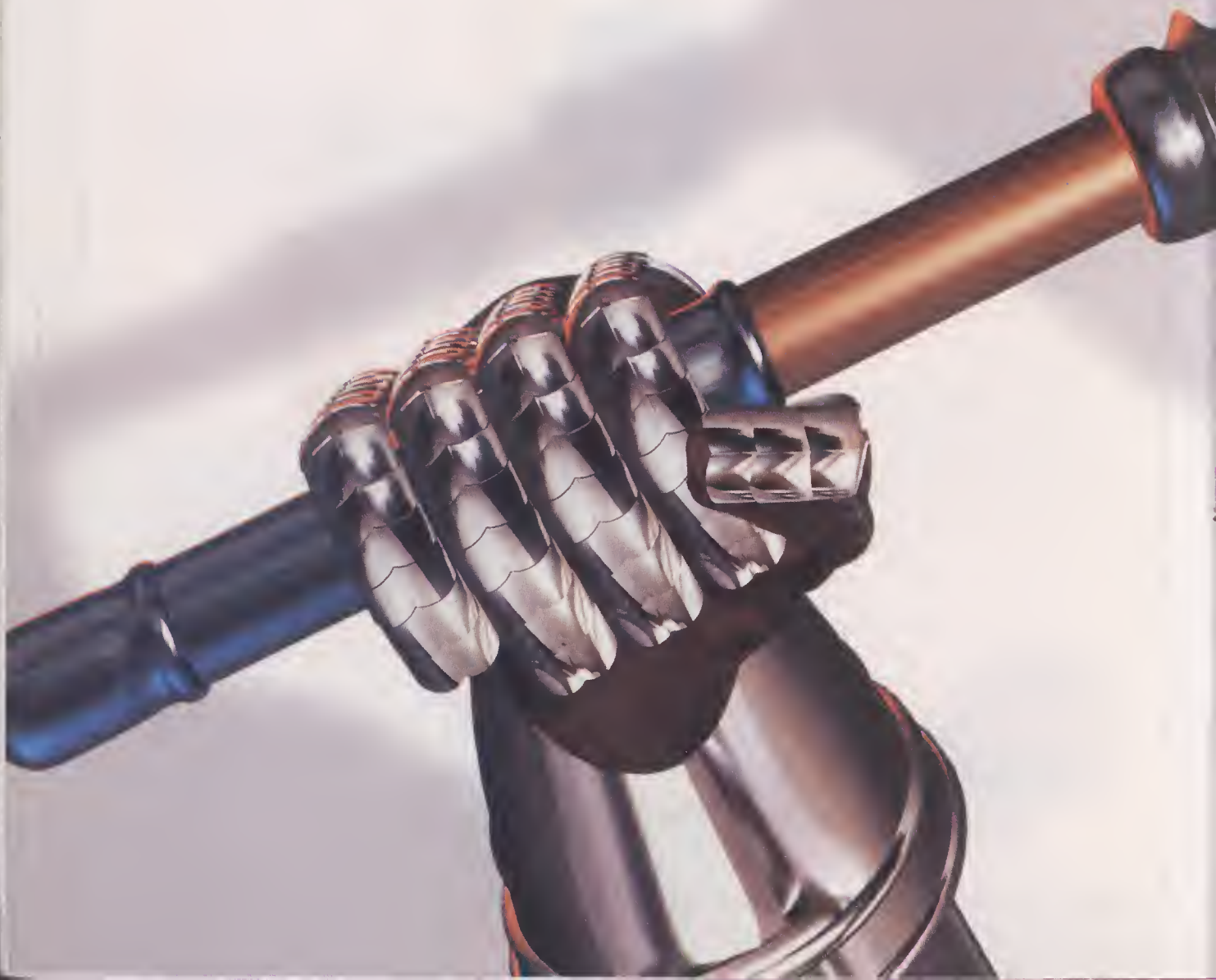
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FAMILY NEWS

TRENDS, PRODUCTS, AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

The **SPEEDIEST** Processor Makes Its Debut

WHEN PENTIUM PROCESSORS hit the market a few years ago, their speed blew away the old 386 and 486 processors. But they were primarily built to improve basic number-crunching functions. To speed up today's multimedia software, Intel realized it needed a processor designed specifically to handle video, audio, and animation.

On January 8th, Intel rolled out its latest CPU — the Pentium processor with MMX. At the same time, major system makers such as Gateway, Micron, Hewlett-Packard, and Compaq introduced new multimedia systems based on MMX processors. These systems immediately became the fastest Pentium computers ever built.

MMX is a set of 57 new instructions designed to speed up the processing of multimedia data types such as sound, graphics, and motion video. As a result, you'll see

smoother animations and faster video frame rates, and you'll spend less time waiting for complex operations — such as photo morphing — to finish. Intel has added MMX to its 166-MHz and 200-MHz Pentium processors and to its 150-MHz and 166-MHz portable Pentium processors (designed for use in laptop computers). The MMX Pentiums also have larger internal caches than does a standard Pentium (32KB total versus 16KB) and other improvements that help boost performance.

The results are impressive. For example, the new Gateway P55C-200 Family PC outperforms even the fastest non-MMX Pentium



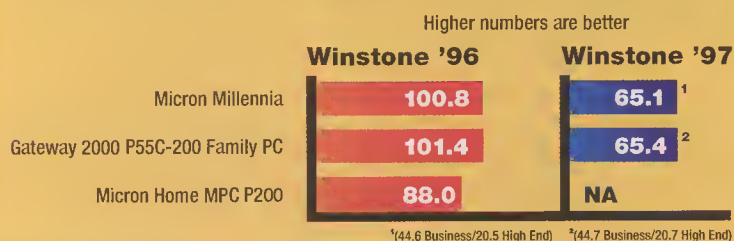
200 systems by more than 10 percent. And because MMX Pentiums are the new high end of the Pentium line, companies are not scrimping on the extras. The Gateway system is typical; it comes with 32MB of SDRAM (synchronous DRAM), a 512KB pipeline burst cache, a 3.8GB hard drive, a 12x CD-ROM drive, and a 33.6-kbps modem. With a 17-inch monitor, it sells for the reasonable price of \$2918. Other companies, such as Micron, are building equally impressive systems (see "Ultimate Gaming Systems").

The biggest performance boost with an MMX system comes when you run software that uses MMX instructions. Few are currently available, but we got to play with a couple. The MMX version of Adobe PhotoDeluxe is much faster when you perform special effects on your scanned photos, and DK Multimedia's The Ultimate Human Body provides smoother animations in its cutaway views. Intel's own videophone features greatly increased frame rates that make calls seem more like TV. Overall, Intel expects an average 60 percent speedup in multimedia applications that use MMX over those that don't.

—Bob Ryan

The MMX **ADVANTAGE**

According to the Ziff-Davis Winstone '96 benchmark, two 200-MHz MMX systems outperform the fastest system previously tested in the *FamilyPC* Lab — the Micron Home MPC P200 — by over 10 percent. As software is written to take advantage of MMX, the difference will increase dramatically. (Also included are Winstone '97 scores for the MMX systems. Winstone '97 wasn't available when we tested the Micron Home MPC, but it will be the basis of all comparisons in *FamilyPC* for the coming year.)



New Designs in Desktop **PUBLISHING**

WIZARDS AND TEMPLATES in desktop publishing programs make it easy to create great-looking documents without much effort. But when you invariably alter these prebuilt pages, it takes a lot of fiddling to make things look right again. And if you want to do something drastic, like change your document from a three-page newsletter to a six-page Web page, you're better off starting from scratch. All that will change when I Publish (Design Intelligence, 206-343-7797) is released this spring.

In simplest terms, I Publish separates content (text and pictures) from form (how the document looks). When you drag text and art onto the page, it automatically gets defined as headline, caption, body text, photo, or art work, depending on where you place it on the page. And the program automatically formats it to match the design of your page. To change the look

of your document, you simply drag a new design onto your page. In one step you can reformat a newsletter, for example, into any number of other designs,

including a series of Web pages complete with links, or a computer slide show. This "write once, publish anywhere" approach will change the way at-home publishers work, allowing them to spend more time designing and less time messing around with type styles and text boxes.



The first version of I Publish will be aimed at small-business users and will sell for \$149. A version containing family-friendly page designs such as greeting cards and certificates will follow this summer. If you want to check out a trial version of the Windows-only program, you can download it at www.design-intelligence.com.

—Kurt Carlson

HIGH-TECH CEREAL PRIZES

Cereal prizes sure have come a long way since the days of plastic decoder rings and temporary tattoos. Starting in March, when your kids rifle through their box of cereal, they may pull out a high-tech gem—a CD-ROM game.



The Chex Quest game, which will be buried in boxes of Rice, Corn, and Wheat Chex, is a nonviolent alien adventure. And with distribution expected to be as high as 5.5 million, it may well become the most widely owned game around.

Once they have the disc, kids can download Chex Quest II, which features more playing levels, from the Quest Web site (www.chexquest.com).

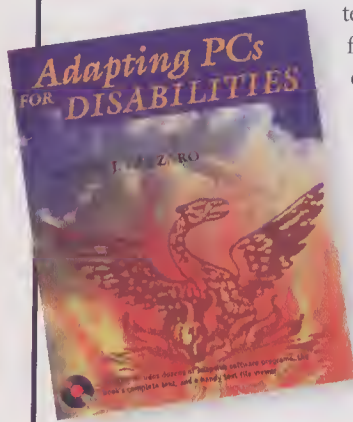
—Valle Dwight

TURN DISABILITIES INTO **ABILITIES**

PHYSICIST STEPHEN HAWKING is one example of a well-known computer user who has a physical disability, but there are tens of thousands of lesser-known people with disabilities who depend daily on computer technology to discover and expand their abilities.

If you're wondering what high-tech products are available and how to find them, Joseph J. Lazzaro, author of the recently published *Adapting PCs for Disabilities* (Addison-Wesley, \$39.95), offers a comprehensive and readable text that will help parents, teachers, employers, and anyone interested in new adaptive PC technologies. While there are a handful of other books on this topic, Lazzaro's is the only text published with a CD-ROM that offers dozens of samples of adaptive software (including programs that make computers talk, display large text, and work with wireless remote controls). The disc also features enlightening articles by authorities probing the uses of virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and video interactive programs in helping the hearing-, vision-, and mobility-impaired join the PC revolution. Even computer users who don't need adaptive technologies will find useful descriptions of innovative and little-known hardware and software (such as Eek, an on-screen keyboard program for Windows that substitutes mouse clicks for keystrokes) that reduce optical, muscular, and mental stress. Lazzaro, who is blind and directs the Adaptive Technology Program at the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, did his homework—in terms of searching out vendors, publications, and Internet sites—and the result is a lucid and detailed description of these empowering resources.

—Norman Weinstein





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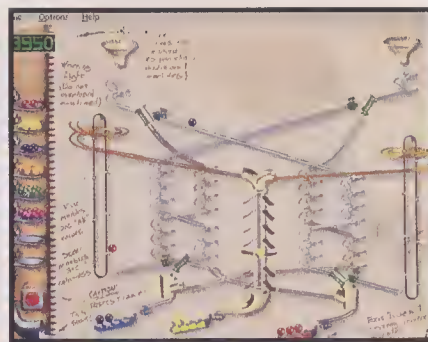
Uncle Bobby Fennel is having a party, but someone forgot to bring the food. In this math title, kids must help Bobby's niece and nephew solve a number of story problems to find party treats to feed five historical guests, including Einstein

and Cleopatra. In the interactive story problems, players learn math concepts such as reasoning, computation, estimation, algebra, and time. There are several rooms to explore, such as the Dream Room and Mission Control, where children learn to use math tools such as timers and protractors. McGraw-Hill Home Interactive, 800-937-4663 or 415-829-6200; Windows 95 CD, \$29.95; ages 8 to 14.



Marble Drop

This new twist on traditional puzzle games challenges players to explore the workings of 50 mechanical puzzles. Players drop different-colored marbles into a puzzle machine, trying to get the correct color into its corresponding bin. The challenge is to see how many marbles will fall in the end. Players can choose from a variety of pin-



ball-like gadgets to alter the marbles' path. Players can earn bonus points, and hidden puzzles are an even bigger treat. Maxis, 800-336-2947 or 510-933-5630; Windows and Windows 95 CD, \$29.95; all ages.

1996 Guinness Multimedia Disc of Records

Kids love this classic reference of odd facts and feats. Who wouldn't want to know how big the world's largest popcorn ball is or how much the heaviest human brain weighed? This CD-ROM presents more than 15,000 records set by humans, as well as popular culture statistics and natural wonders of the world. The Picture Index includes more than 1200 photos, and there are more than 300 new video clips and animations to illustrate the records. Grol-

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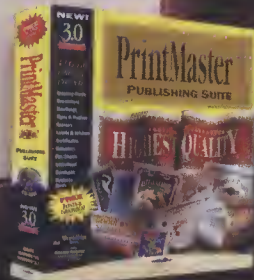
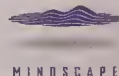


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er Interactive, 800-285-4534 or 203-797-3530; Mac and Windows CD, \$19.95; all ages.

NFL Reading

In this sporty program, kids choose their favorite NFL team, call a play, and then read a passage — there are more than 1800 in all. How well they answer questions about the passage determines how well their team does in a 3-D football game. There is even a trivia library and NFL player database accessible during the game so kids can look up answers as they play. Sanctuary Woods, 800-943-3664 or 415-286-6000; Mac, Windows, and Windows 95 CD, \$29.99; ages 9 to 13.

The Last Express

This mystery game is set on the eve of World War I, on a train not unlike the Orient Express. The plot involves a young American named Robert Cath who is going to meet his friend, Tyler Whitney, on a train leaving Paris for Constantinople. When Whitney is murdered, Cath assumes his identity and is plunged into a world of mystery, romance, and international intrigue as he tries to find the killer. Brøderbund, 800-521-6263 or 415-382-4700; Mac and Windows CD, \$45 street; ages 13 and up.



Top of the Key: The Slam Dunk Typing Teacher

This arcade-style game puts kids through their paces on the basketball court as they learn and improve their typing skills. The game includes a total of 70 challenges for beginning to advanced typists. On-screen hands show the correct method and positioning for the entire keyboard, and an online coach monitors progress and offers tips. MaryBoies Software (distributed by Time Warner Electronic Publishing), 800-510-1791 or 212-522-7381; Mac and Windows CD, \$29.95; ages 8 and up.

FAMILY

Battles of the World

History buffs get a comprehensive look at 10 of the world's most pivotal battles, from 2750 B.C. to the present. This CD-ROM includes historical footage, 3-D animation, maps, and strategy ex-



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The World Book 1997 Multimedia Encyclopedia

Geared toward students from kindergarten to twelfth grade, this two-CD-ROM set includes the full text of the 22-volume print *World Book Encyclopedia*, as well as online extras including monthly updates, editor-recommended sites, and a free trial account with Electric Library. Interactive sim-

ulations let students see scientific concepts such as falling bodies and gravity. You can search by year, decade, or century in the Time Frame section, and tools such as the Highlighter and Outliner help you organize the information once you've gathered it. The CD-ROMs include maps (with good old-fashioned overlays) and a dictionary with 225,000 hot-linked words. IBM, 800-426-7235 or 770-835-6881; Windows 95 CD, \$60.

—compiled by Julia Lynch

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If you think big-screen computing is out of your financial reach, take a look at the Arcadia Super-Monitor line. The lower-end models, the AR 2.7 (\$799) and the AR 3.1 (\$1199), offer a 27-inch and a 31-inch viewable area, respectively, with 24-bit true color and resolutions of 640 by 480 pixels at 60 Hz (IBM), 640 by 480 at 75 Hz (VESA), and 800 by 600 at 60 Hz (VESA), and integrated speakers. The monitors can double as a television — either full-screen or with the TV in a window — if you have a TV tuner card installed on your computer. The higher-end models, the AR 2.7 AV (\$999) and the AR 3.1 AV (\$1399), come with NTSC (National Television Standard Committee), for full-screen television or video viewing without a special TV tuner card. They will be available in March. Princeton Graphic Systems, 800-747-6249 or 714-751-8405.



electricity, heat, and condensation, have an estimated data lifetime of 30 years. Disk prices range from \$35 to \$38. The Dynamo also reads and writes to the earlier 230MB and 128MB MO disks. Fujitsu, 800-626-4686 or 408-894-3950; \$599 street.

All Video All the Time

Bigpicture from U.S. Robotics is designed to combine all the hardware and software you'll need to capture, edit, manipulate, and send video. The all-in-one Bigpicture Video Kit includes a U.S. Robotics 33.6 voice/video fax modem, an NTSC color video camera with integrated microphone, and a video-capture card. The software includes Kai's Power Goo and applications for video editing and conferencing software. U.S. Robotics, 800-342-5877 or 847-676-7010; \$399.

Umax Takes a Bite Out of Apple

The latest Mac clone, Umax's SuperMac C600/240 is a mini-tower based on the 240-MHz PowerPC 603e processor, for \$2295 (without monitor). The system ships with 24MB of RAM, a 256KB level 2 cache, a 2.1GB IDE hard drive, 1MB of video memory, an 8x CD-ROM drive, a 28.8-kbps fax/data modem, and 16-bit 3-D sound. Software includes ClarisWorks, Quicken, EarthLink Network Total Access, and more. Umax, 800-232-8629 or 510-226-6886; \$2295 (without monitor).

Elbow Room

Back up your computer data using the Dynamo 640, a large-capacity magnetic-optical drive from Fujitsu. This external drive uses standard 3.5-inch MO disks that store up to 640MB of data — the same capacity as a CD-ROM. The disks, which are built to be immune to magnets,

Increase Your Firepower

The new Firebird 2 Programmable Joystick from Advanced Gravis features 13 buttons and a drag-and-drop software interface that lets you customize or create control sets by pressing a key or clicking the mouse. The Firebird's memory accepts up to 106 keystrokes so that you can activate cheat codes with one press of a button. The ergonomic grip and hand rest is designed to reduce fatigue while still providing excellent control and firepower. The joystick is Windows 95-compatible and works with all PC flight and action games currently on the market. Advanced Gravis, 800-663-8558; \$89.95.



—compiled by Lauren Simonds

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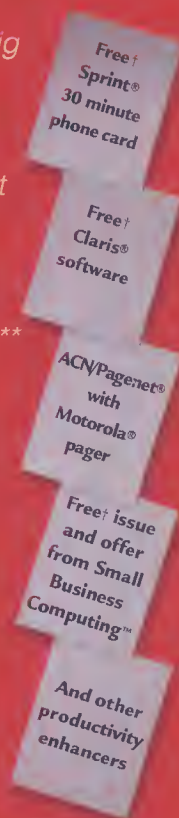
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ILLUSTRATION: KEN DAVIES

Parents' **GUIDE** **TO THE WEB**

FamilyPC's essential superguide shows you how to connect, communicate, collect, and create

It seems that to be a good computing parent in the '90s you have to know how to set up your PC, evaluate software, assemble a CD-ROM library that's not only educationally correct but also cool, and, perhaps most challenging of all, get your family connected to the World Wide Web and use it to communicate, create, and collect information. To show you that the Web is a family-friendly place, we bring you the *FamilyPC* essential superguide to the Web. Plus, we canvassed more than 500 families in our Web Families Tell All survey, and we include their comments and observations in "Web Testers Tell All" quote boxes that open each section. So read on, log on, and get ready to bring your family into the world of the Web.

CONTENTS

- 45** **Connect: First Step**
FamilyPC sorts out all your family's online options.
- 57** **Communicate: Reach Out Online**
From free-mail to Web phones, talk is on the wire.
- 63** **Collect: Search Smart**
Top tips and helpful hints for finding what you want.
- 75** **Create: Family Web Pages**
Home, home on the Web — tools and techniques.



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CONNECT:

First Step

We sort out your options for getting connected

WHEN THE WORLD WIDE WEB was young (only a couple years ago), it was primarily a hangout for college kids, academics, and only the most technologically advanced families. Families online tended to hang out on commercial services that offered a more controlled environment — America Online, CompuServe, Prodigy, and later the Microsoft Network — and only linked to the World Wide Web as a sidelight and as a concession to their more intrepid members. Things have certainly changed.



Web Testers TELL ALL

How has the Web affected your family life?

"I don't think it has 'altered' my family life. It has added to it. We use the Internet to find information. Also, to communicate quickly with anyone in the world is fascinating. My son had a pen pal in Ireland for a while. It was fun. They did not have snow."

—Kirsty Piquette, St. Paul,
Alberta, Canada

"In the evening, after work and farm chores, I use it to unwind."

—Kenneth Crews,
Tonganoxie, Kansas

"It's just made using the computer more interesting; plus, I can 'reach out and touch' more people."

—Elizabeth Carter,
Milton, Florida

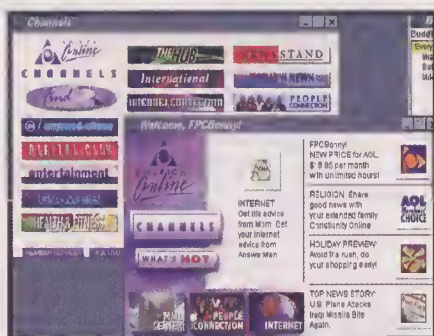
"When we need to find something, it is not like the old days. Now you can get information at the touch of a mouse click."

—William Roberts,
Hartsville, South Carolina

"It has given my son an interest that he can share with friends anywhere; it is something that he and I share an interest in."

—Keith Merritt,
Napa, California





Online Options Getting wired to the Web involves a choice between services like AOL and MSN and ISPs.

Today the Web is where it's at, and families looking for the best way to get wired have several options, including the commercial online services, national ISPs (Internet service providers), and local ISPs. Each way to the Web has its strengths and weaknesses in areas such as price, ease of use, and features, and the *FamilyPC* essential superguide to the Web walks you through all of them.

Commercial Online Services

The distinction between a commercial online service and an ISP is blurring more each day as families are spending more and more time on the Web and commercial services adjust to give them what they want. Still, there are some essential differences.

► **Commercial Service Strengths:** In general, commercial services offer a full set of easy-to-use tools for everything families want to do online — browse information, send e-mail, download files, and participate in bulletin boards and chats. You just load the service's software and dial a (usually) local number, and you're set to go. Commercial online services also offer an assortment of family-friendly content available only to their members, along with access to the more open world of anyone-can-come Web sites. Commercial services — particularly America On-

line — also provide parental controls for monitoring kids' access to Web sites, sections of the service (especially chat), and e-mail.

► **Commercial Service Weaknesses:** The downside of the commercial services route to the Web is that high-end do-it-yourselfers can't experiment with the latest Internet gadgets and gizmos unless the service provider offers them. And even then, subscribers have only one choice of such items as Web phones or e-mail services.

► **Options:** America Online (800-827-6364; \$19.95 per month); Prodigy Internet (800-776-3449; \$19.95 per month); the Microsoft Network (800-373-3676; \$19.95 per month). CompuServe doesn't offer a flat-rate option and is not a good value for families that will mostly be wandering the Web.

National ISPs

Since the Web works by sending information over the telephone lines, it was only a matter of time before the long-distance telephone companies got into the act. Companies such as AT&T, MCI, and Sprint offer Internet access services (see October 1996 *What's On*), as do companies like EarthLink Network, Netcom, and SpryNet. These national ISPs generally offer cheap access to the Web. Some offer a bit of specialized member-only content to their subscribers

GETTING Connected Checklist

What to look for when you're looking to get online

Once you've made up your mind about whether you want specialty content and which types of tools you prefer to use, take the remaining contenders for a free trial spin. The best services will provide the following:

- ☒ A flat rate that covers all costs
- ☒ A local (free) dial-up number
- ☒ The latest version of a standard browser (Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator), with built-in e-mail support and newsgroups
- ☒ A fast, reliable connection at the times you're online. To check this with a local provider, ask about the subscriber-to-modem ratio — it should not be more than 12 to 1.
- ☒ 24-hour tech-support options (phone and online support)
- ☒ Space on the server for personal Web pages if you'd like to build them

THE BROWSER BATTLE

Netscape Navigator versus Internet Explorer

Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer are both excellent Web browsers. Be sure the access provider you choose — from America Online to a local ISP — gives you one or the other (or, better yet, a choice of either). America Online, Prodigy Internet, and CompuServe offer Internet Explorer 3.0 as the default browser. The Microsoft Network has its own browser built on the latest version of Internet Explorer. Meanwhile, ISPs — whether national or local — tend to offer copies of Navigator 2.0 (or higher) as part of their software suites.

In terms of operation and delivery of Web pages, Navigator and Internet Explorer are similar. They both display pages with fancy HTML layouts (including frames, tables, and image animations), offer a plethora of plug-ins (such as Shockwave for animations and RealAudio for sound) to enhance your browsing, and support Java-based scripts that add all kinds of interesting features to Web pages, such as pop-up and pull-down menus and roll-over effects (i.e., something happens when your mouse rolls over an area).

One important option families can get with Internet Explorer is built-in RSACi filtering, which allows parents to block access to sites with sexual or violent content (see January Makeovers and "The Web in Real Life" in this issue's "Collect: Search Smart"). Netscape is planning to offer parental controls soon, but when this story went to press, a deal had not yet been announced.

If you're already on the Web and want to check out both browsers' strengths and weaknesses for yourself, it's easy to download versions to try out. Get Netscape Navigator 3.0 at www.netscape.com, and Internet Explorer at www.microsoft.com/ie. If you plan to keep Navigator 3.0, it's \$49. Internet Explorer is free.

—Joe Panepinto



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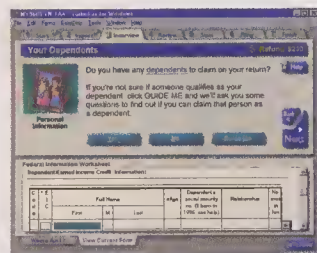
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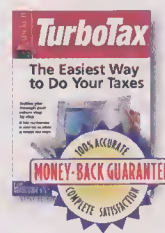
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March 1996



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TOP 100 SOFTWARE



Get Set, Go Commercial services like Prodigy have seen that the Web is the way of the future and now offer Web-based services with special members-only features.

(usually little more than a home page with some tech support and links), but most offer only the bare essentials: a Web browser (usually Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer) with integrated e-mail, FTP for downloading, and a newsgroup reader.

► **National ISP Strength:** You can use whatever shareware and commercial applications you

Passport (800-359-3900, \$19.95 per month); and SpryNet (800-777-9638, \$19.95 per month).

Local ISPs

Your final option for getting your family connected to the Web is to choose a local ISP (look in the Yellow Pages of your phone

like. Among the best are Free Agent 1.1 for reading newsgroups, Eudora Pro 3.0 for managing e-mail, and CuteFTP for file transfers. You can find trial or shareware versions of these products at ZD Net's Shareware Library at www.hotfiles.com.
► **National ISP Weakness:** You're essentially on your own for upgrading, configuring tools, and controlling access to the Web.

► **Options:** AT&T WorldNet (800-967-5363, \$19.95 per month); EarthLink Network (800-395-8425, \$19.95 per month); Sprint Internet

book under *Internet Provider*). Their technological strengths and content weaknesses are the same as those of national ISPs, but the local ISPs have the distinct advantage of accessibility: If you have a problem, you can go down to the office to discuss it or get tech support in person.

The disadvantage of local ISPs is that there are lots of small providers selling access to the Web, and many of them will either over-subscribe, thereby giving you an unreliable connection (and long waits to connect to their server), or go out of business, leaving you with an e-mail address and little else.

Your Choice

Getting your family connected to the wide world of the Web may not be a requirement of modern-day parenting, but it's close. By getting online, you're entering a new world of information, people, and entertainment that's going to become as much a part of our family lives and as familiar as television, radio, and movies were to earlier generations.

Bonny Georgia is a FamilyPC contributing editor. E-mail her at FPCBonny@aol.com.

BROWSE THE WEB FROM THE BARCALOUNGER

Connection tools of the future let you log in from your living room

If Internet appliance manufacturers have their way, channel surfing will take on a whole new meaning. With a remote control and a device about the size of a cable box connected to your TV, you can browse the Web from the comfort of your favorite easy chair. Several Internet boxes are available already, targeted at consumers wanting Internet access without the expense of a traditional PC-and-modem setup. The price? Around \$300, not including Internet access charges.

Internet appliances are equipped with a 28.8-kbps or faster modem (sometimes upgradable to cable or ISDN) and an infrared remote control to skip from link to link. Most have an optional infrared keyboard and serial or parallel ports for connecting printers or other peripherals. All the Internet boxes have simple setup in common — you just plug the box into your TV or VCR and then hook it up to your phone line. Some, like the Sony WebTV and the Philips Magnavox Internet Terminals, require connection to a specific online service for Web access and e-mail; the JCC i-Box, on the other hand, will let you use whatever Internet access provider you choose.

The Philips Magnavox Internet TV Terminal (\$329.99; 423-521-4316), Sony WebTV Internet Terminal (\$349.95; 888-772-7669), and JCC i-Box (\$495; 415-473-1106) are in stores now. Others due for release soon are Bandai Digital Entertainment's Pippin@World (\$499; 310-404-1600) and FutureNet's BabyBear (\$499; 805-295-8200).

There are other things afoot in the getting-online-from-home world.

New modem technologies promise to bring you all the speed you need — but be patient, or you'll pay the price.

The latest word in consumer connection options is "double-speed" 56-kbps modems, available this spring from manufacturers like U.S. Robotics, Cardinal Technology, and Best Data. There is no current standard for doubling technology; until one is adopted, you'll only be able to connect with ISPs that support your modem. Look for a communication standard and support for 56 kbps from Internet access providers soon.

For home offices with high-bandwidth demands, digital ISDN adapters and cable modems are an expensive but speedy alternative. Like 56-kbps modems, cable modems have not yet been standardized, but they promise the speedy transmission rate of up to 4 mbps (140 times faster than a 28.8-kbps modem). As early as this spring, large markets will begin leasing modems to cable customers at a cost of around \$45 a month for access. By contrast, ISDN offers speeds of 128 kbps, with adapters costing between \$300 and \$500, plus installation, hourly connect time charges from your ISP, and per-minute rates from your local telephone company. Until there are flat-rate connection fees, cheaper adapters, and easier setup options, leave ISDN to technowizards with caviar budgets.

—Bonny Georgia



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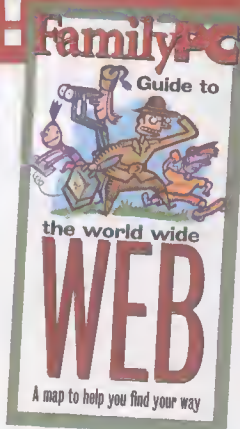
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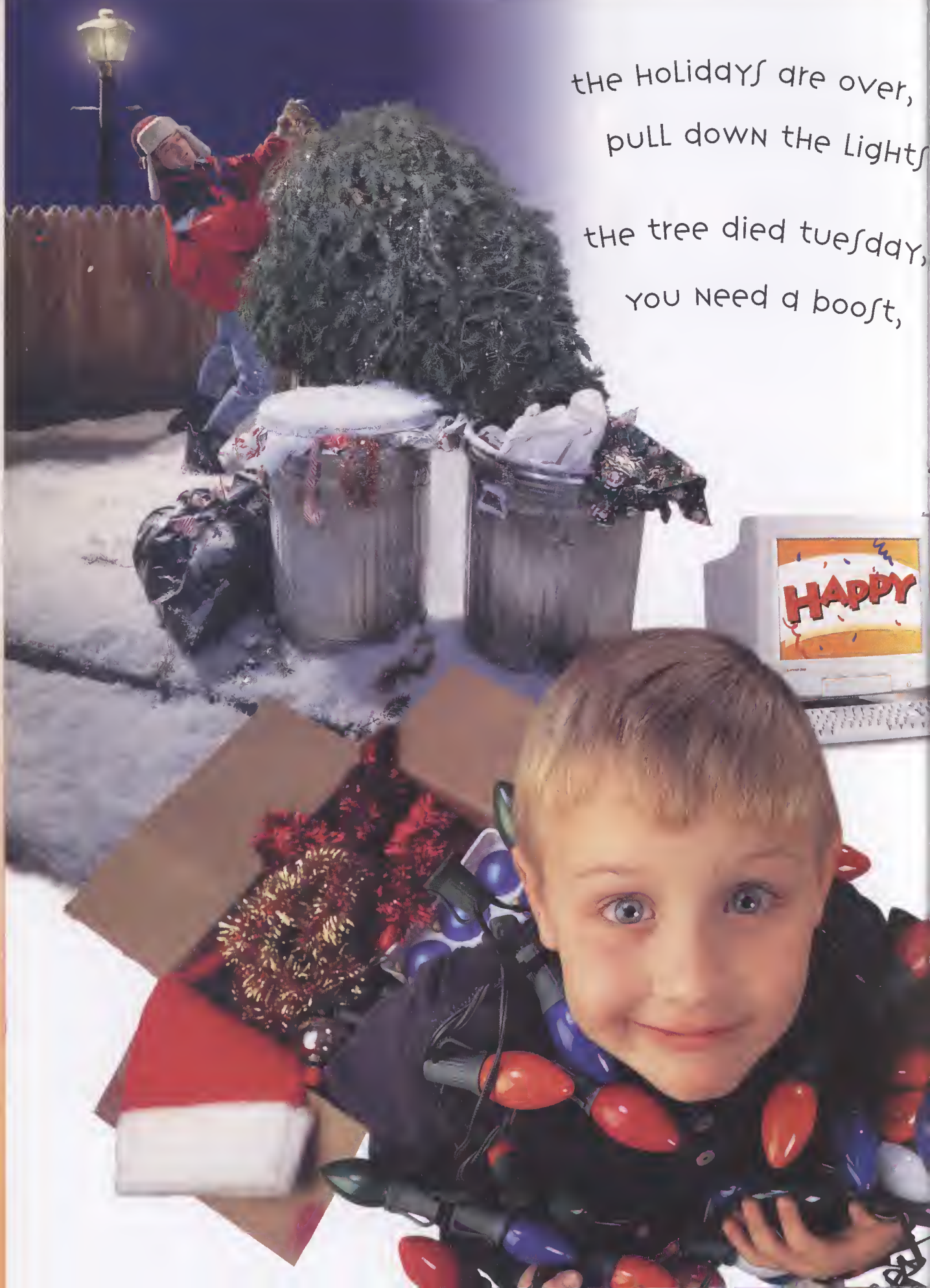
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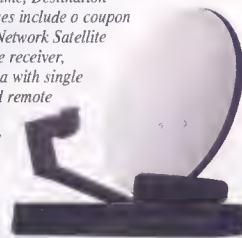
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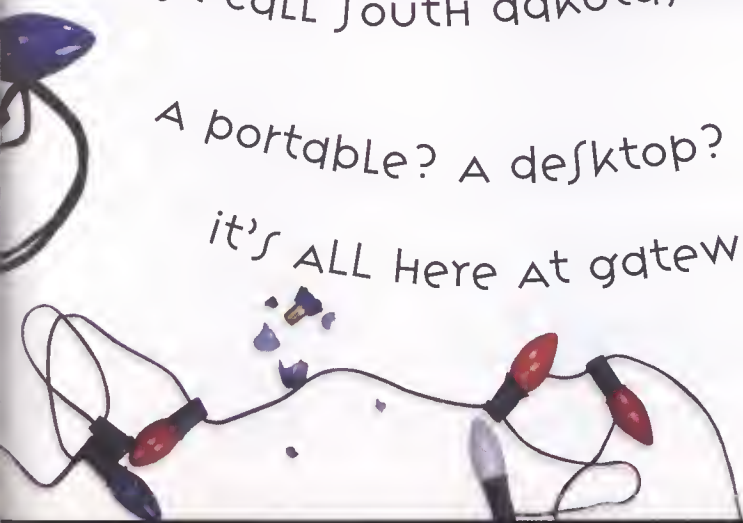
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- Mini Tower Case
- 104* Keyboard & MS Mouse 2.0
- MS Windows 95
- Generations III Software Collection
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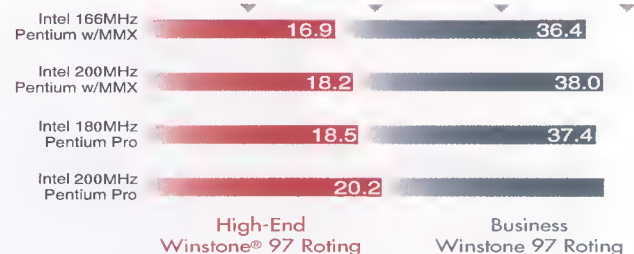
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Performance Graph



Ziff-Davis' Winstone 97 Version 1.0 produced scores of 16.9 and 36.4; 18.2 and 38.0; 18.5 and 37.4; and 20.2 and 42.7 Winstone Version 1.0 units on its Business Winstone 97 suite and High-end Winstone 97 suite on Gateway 2000, Inc. PCs configured with 166MHz Intel Pentium Processor with MMX technology, 200MHz Intel Pentium Processor with MMX technology, 180MHz Intel Pentium Pro processor and 200MHz Intel Pentium Pro processor, respectively. All Gateway 2000 PCs tested featured 32MB RAM, 256K RAM cache, 3.8GB hard disk, IDE controller, FAT file system, and no hardware disk cache. Systems include S3 ViRGE/VX graphics adapter, with 4MB VRAM with v1.23m3 driver, 1024x768 with 256 colors, and a refresh rate of 75Hz. Test systems used in MS DOS 7.1 and MS Windows 95. All products used in the test were shipping versions available to the general public, and the test and its results were not verified by Ziff Davis.



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- 256K Pipelined Burst Cache
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- 2.5GB 11ms EIDE Hard Drive
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- Mini Tower Case
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P5-200

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- Mini Tower Case
- 104* Keyboard & MS Mouse 2.0
- MS Windows 95
- MS Office 95, Professional Edition
- MS Office 97, Professional Edition Upgrade Coupon*

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G6-200

- Intel 200MHz Pentium Pro Processor
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- 256K Internal Cache
- Vivitron700 .26dp Monitor (15.9" viewable area)
- STB ViRGE/VX 4MB, 3-D 64-Bit PCI Graphics
- 3.8GB 11ms EIDE Hard Drive
- 12X CD-ROM/3.5" Diskette Drives
- Tower Case
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(includes SCSI controller and 1GB cartridge)
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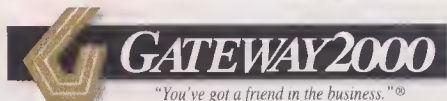
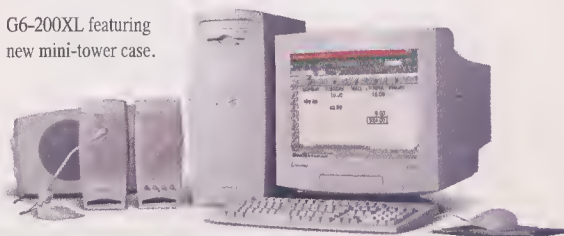
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Web Testers TELL ALL

How has the Web affected your family life?

"My sister and I have 'talked' more via e-mail than we have spoken with each other either in person or by phone in the last 10 years. We have grown closer."

—David Leeson,
Garland, Texas

"[The Web] has been a vital link between my children at college and myself. It has provided a quick source of information to assist me in helping my children with assignments."

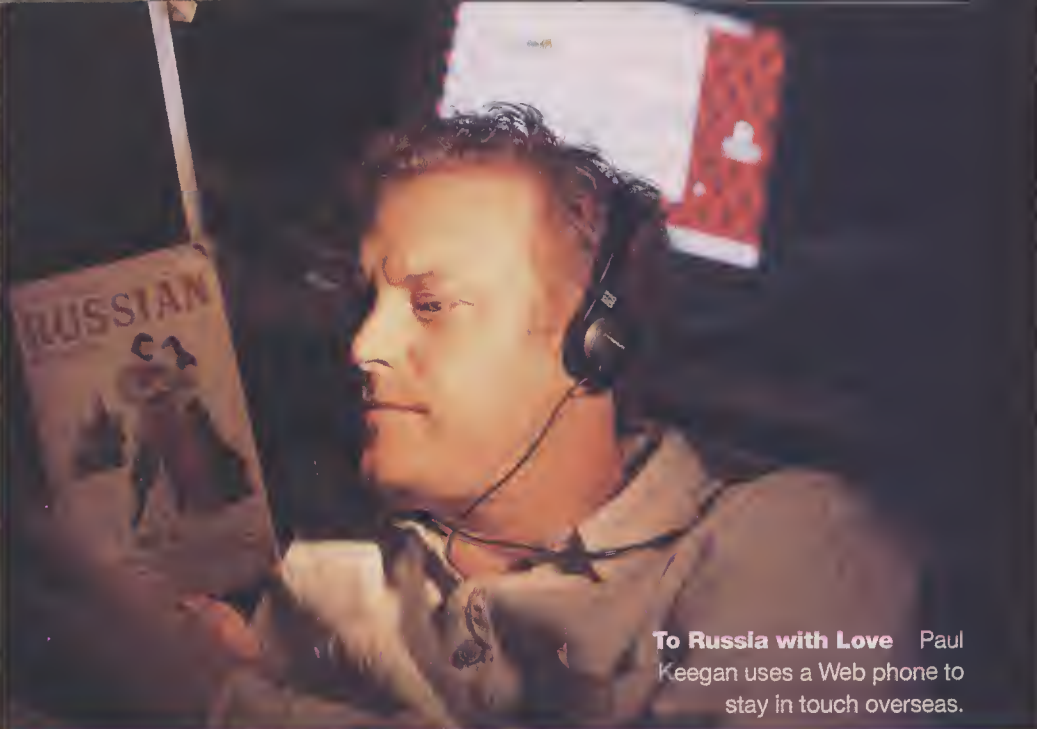
—Marc Leavey,
Stevenson, Maryland

"The Internet has opened a whole new world with unlimited resources and possibilities to our family. We have met people from all over the world. The Internet has given our family a means to communicate with others that the normal mail system could not even compete with."

—Kimberly Endicott,
Coldwater, Michigan

"It has given us a way to communicate (e-mail) with relatives all across the country."

—Ed Schaplow,
Lynnwood, Washington



To Russia with Love Paul Keegan uses a Web phone to stay in touch overseas.

PARENTS' GUIDE TO THE WEB

BY JOE PANEPIATO

COMMUNICATE:

Reach Out

ONLINE

Free-mail, Web phones, and other ways to talk

FANCY GRAPHICS, INTERACTIVE GAMES, EYE-CATCHING WEB SITES, and the promise of exciting new technologies may draw families online, but what keeps them there is more practical: The online world offers families a new way to stay in touch with friends and with each other and gives them a new way to meet friends and other families who share their interests.

The simple communication solutions on the Web are e-mail and bulletin boards, where you type messages and share them with others. The more complex options include Internet telephones, where you can actually hear the

Family-Friendly Places to Meet

Cyberspace is the place

KIDS

- ✓ GusTown (www.gustown.com)
- ✓ National Geographic (www.nationalgeographic.com)
- ✓ Yuckiest Site on the Internet (www.nj.com/yucky)
- ✓ Fledge (www.fledge.com)
- ✓ Kids Stuff (www.pathfinder.com/kids)
- ✓ Bonus.com (www.bonus.com)
- ✓ Freezone (www.freezone.com)
- ✓ Jinx (www.jinx.com)
- ✓ Kids World (www.kidsworld.com)
- ✓ Jamz (www.jamz.com)

PARENTS

- ✓ Family.com (www.family.com)
- ✓ Family Education Network (www.familyeducation.com)
- ✓ Family Internet (www.familyinternet.com)
- ✓ Family Planet (www.familyplanet.com)
- ✓ KidSource Online (www.kidsource.com)
- ✓ Parent Soup (www.parentsoup.com)
- ✓ Parenting-qa.com (www.parenting-qa.com)
- ✓ ParentsPlace.com (www.parentsplace.com)
- ✓ ParenthoodWeb.com (www.parenthoodweb.com)
- ✓ World Village (www.worldvillage.com)

person you're talking to (see "Message to Moscow").

E-Mail for Families

Whether you sign up for Internet access through a commercial online service or an ISP (Internet service provider), you don't

have to worry about setting up your e-mail — it's built in (see "Connect: First Step"). In most cases, you get the default e-mail features built into the browser your ISP offers, whether it's Netscape Navigator or Microsoft's Internet Explorer (see "Browsers Battle over E-Mail"). You can, however, use any e-mail software you want, such as Eudora (it

comes in Light and Pro versions), which offers lots of extras such as mail filtering, nested folders for organizing incoming mail, text formatting, and drag-and-drop capabilities (Mac and Windows; Qualcomm, 619-587-1121, www.eudora.com).

When it comes to Internet and Web-based e-mail, however, there is one basic problem for families: With ISPs, it's one account, one address. That means that to get multiple e-mail addresses (one for each member of the family) you're going to have to get multiple accounts and pay multiple monthly bills.

Fortunately, there are several economical options when Mom, Dad, and each of the kids want a different e-mail address: free-mail packages such as Juno, NetAddress, and HotMail, and commercial online services such as America Online.

Free-mail is free for the same reason broadcast TV is free: Each time you write or read an electronic message you are presented with an ad, so you are essentially paying for the service by paying attention. Three free-mail services are currently available for families that are connected to the World Wide Web via an

NET@DDRESS **USA.NET**

IMAGINE AN E-MAIL ADDRESS THAT WILL FOLLOW YOU FAITHFULLY WHEREVER YOU GO... AND IT'S TOTALLY FREE!

YOUR FREE NETADDRESS IS PERMANENT!
NO MATTER WHERE YOU GO, YOU'LL NEVER HAVE TO CHANGE YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS AGAIN!
CHECK YOUR E-MAIL FROM ANYWHERE!
CHECK YOUR E-MAIL FROM YOUR WEB BROWSER, OR USE YOUR FAVORITE E-MAIL SOFTWARE.

CLICK HERE TO SUBSCRIBE FOR FREE

WELCOME! FEATURES FAQ SUBSCRIBE COMING SOON LOGIN

Free and Faithful E-mail through NetAddress (as well as HotMail) costs nothing.

ISP: Juno (Windows only; 800-654-5866, www.juno.com), USA.Net's NetAddress (Mac and Windows; 800-592-1240, www.usa.net), and HotMail (Mac and Windows; 408-222-7000, www.hotmail.com). Get as many accounts as you like with any of these services — it won't cost you a dime.

With America Online (800-827-6364), you can sign up five family members on a single billing statement, which means up to five people can each have a unique e-mail address included in the \$19.95-per-month flat rate you pay.

Once you have an e-mail address, your family can do several things online — send messages directly to other people who have e-mail addresses you know, participate in bulletin boards or newsgroups with people who share your interests, or sign up for a mailing list that will arrive regularly in your e-mail box. For example, even though the Lawton family (see January Makeovers) had only one e-mail address, they got much more out of the Web when they signed up for mailing lists and electronic newsletters available at their favorite sites. Plus, with sites like Mercury Mail (www.merc.com), you can sign up for free, ad-supported e-mail news flashes on a variety of topics ranging from the Closing Bell (for stock news) to Sports Wrap. You tell Mercury Mail your information preferences by filling in a user profile, and it sends

BROWSERS BATTLE OVER E-MAIL

Browsers improve their built-in mail capabilities

The two most popular browsers on the Web — Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer — are building in the kind of e-mail improvements you used to get only with dedicated e-mail products. Internet Explorer 3.0 (www.microsoft.com/ie/) includes enhanced Internet Mail and News. Enhancements to Internet Mail include support for some HTML in messages, meaning if someone sends you a message with an e-mail address in it, you can double-click on it to open a new message with the address already in the To: line; in addition, if you double-click on a site address in the mail message, Internet Explorer automatically takes you to that page.

Netscape (www.netscape.com) is adding some e-mail improvements of its own to the upcoming Netscape Communicator suite (due out soon). The key to the package for families is Netscape Messenger e-mail, which offers drag-and-drop document organization so you can pull messages into organized folders, and advanced sorting and filtering to help sift through e-mail.

—Joe Panepinto



IT SEEMS TO US
(C L I C K)
SWINGING A CLUB
(C L I C K)
IN MOST PC GOLF SIMS
(C L I C K)
ISN'T EXACTLY
LIKE SWINGING A
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(W H O O S H)



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SO REAL YOU CAN ALMOST
SMELL THE GRASS.

Not only is the swing like real golf, so is the entire game! Texture-mapped graphics duplicate world-famous cours-



es to within inches. So now you can play The Prince in Kauai or the Pete Dye Golf Club in Bridgeport, WV without collecting frequent flyer miles.

IT DOESN'T JUST LOOK REAL.
IT PLAYS REAL.

Designed by Vance Cook, the genius behind Links 386, this new game gets a double eagle for authenticity. ● Super-accurate, physics-based ball movement.

● Fully 3-D on-screen golfer mimics your swing. ● 13 types of play, including skins, best-ball, and scramble. ● Network play with up to 255 golfers. Any way you slice it (and we hope you don't) you'll be playing a game that's so real it's unreal.



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you a collection of the Web's top stories as frequently as you specify.

Other Options

Bulletin boards and newsgroups vary quite a bit in the way they work, but the idea is the same from the bulletin boards of America Online to Parent Soup on the Web: Find a topic you like, read messages others have posted, and then, if you like, reply with a message of your own. "Family-Friendly Places to Meet" lists 20 top places where parents and kids on the Web congregate.

If you're willing to venture into the more untamed world of Usenet newsgroups (which tend to be unmoderated and unsupervised) for information on computers — or hobbies of all sorts — go to DejaNews (www.dejanews.com) to search for the right spot. Chatting online — typing messages to other people, who read them and respond immediately — is growing in popularity and becoming more family-friendly. But only 18 percent of respondents to our Web Families Tell All survey let their kids chat; most are waiting for better controls.

In the End

While media hype about the Web focuses on the Web as a revolution in entertainment and education, the real revolution is coming in the way families communicate — with each other and with others — using the simple but powerful technologies that bring them together.

Joe Panepinto is executive editor of FamilyPC. E-mail him at joe_panepinto@zd.com.

E-PHONE OPTIONS

Hear the person you're talking to over the Internet

If you want to try an Internet phone to keep in touch with relatives without sending your phone bill through the roof, check out VocalTec's Internet Phone (Mac and Windows 95, \$50; 201-768-9400), VoxWare's TeleVox (Windows download at www.voxware.com; two weeks free, \$29.95 for full version), or the WebPhone (Windows download at www.netspeak.com; \$49.95 for full version). Other options include freeware that integrates well with your browser, such as Microsoft's NetMeeting (Windows 95; download at www.microsoft.com/ie) and Netscape's CoolTalk (Mac and Windows; download at www.netscape.com). —Joe Panepinto

Message to Moscow

A couple tries to stay in touch the Web phone way

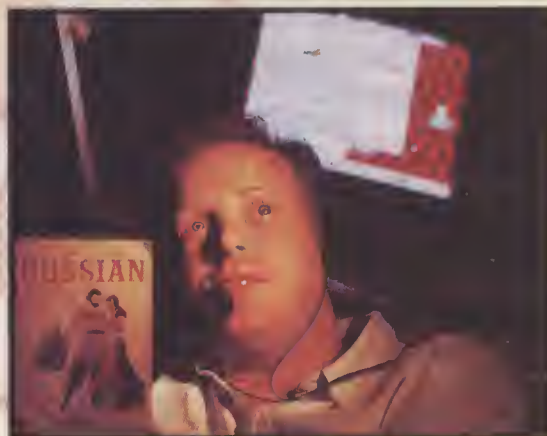
When my girlfriend Erin took a job as a reporter in Moscow, I wanted to hear the sound of her voice and not pay \$1.50 per minute for the privilege. So I decided to try Internet phones, which let you use your computer to gab forever to anyone, anywhere in the world, for just the cost of your Internet access.

To try an Internet phone, you need a computer equipped with a microphone, a modem, a sound card capable of full-duplex communication (full duplex means you can send and receive data simultaneously; check your system manual), and Internet phone software. Because Internet telephones are so new, there is no standard way for them to work, so each software package does things like compression differently. Until standards are established, you can talk only to people who have the same software you do.

Once you have your hardware set up and the software installed, an Internet phone works like this: You dial up a server that lists other people you can talk with and then choose a person you want to talk with, and the software connects you (all the software deals with Internet phone numbers and addresses differently). When you talk into your computer's microphone, your voice gets digitized, compressed, and sent out over the phone lines via your modem. At the other end, the signals are uncompressed, redigitized, and converted into the sound of your voice. Some products, such as IDT's Net2Phone (free Windows download at www.net2phone.com), let you call any real telephone from your PC, but they charge you like a toll call (albeit at a discounted rate). See "E-Phone Options" for more product information.

Setting up an Internet phone connection takes motivation and persistence. Fortunately, I had both. I chose to try VocalTec's Internet Phone (Mac and Windows 95, \$50; 201-768-9400), mainly because it came in the bundle with a piece of hardware I needed called the NexPhone (\$299). The NexPhone helps your computer produce full-duplex

sound, so you don't have to talk one person at a time the way you do when you use a CB radio; both people can talk at the same time (or interrupt each other if they're family members). My new Gateway 2000 computer came with a half-duplex sound card, so even



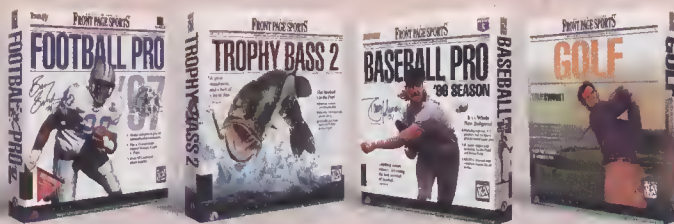
Calling Moscow The author's system is set up for long-distance communication.

though I installed the software pretty easily, the quality of communication was poor until I attached the NexPhone. But you can get a full-duplex sound card built specifically for Internet phones, such as UltraSound from Advanced Gravis (800-257-0061), for around \$150.

I set up Erin's laptop the same way. And after struggling for a few days to get Windows 95 to recognize all the new hardware I installed, I finally achieved full duplex, the Holy Grail of Internet telephony.

When Erin arrived in Moscow, it took her a while to find a reliable Internet service provider. The Soviet phone lines transmit at only 19.2 kbps, which is slower than the recommended 28.8 kbps for Internet phones, and sometimes we get a bad connection that causes annoying delays and makes the ends of sentences drop off. But for the most part, we've accomplished the miracle of being able to talk from opposite ends of the planet almost for free. The sound quality is not as good as you'd get with a real telephone, but we've gladly traded that so we can ramble long into the night about the small things life is made of — and interrupt each other at will.

—Paul Keegan is a freelance writer living in New York City.



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Web Testers **TELL ALL**

How has the Web affected your family life?

"We have been able to find out all kinds of things, from weather (hurricanes) to how far it is to travel from one place to another; we have been able to get pricing on renting RVs for vacation. Also, it has increased our children's interest in computers and in reading articles and stories that they find."

—Yvonne Hickman,
Deland, Florida

"I am disabled, and [the Web] allows me access to the library without going there."

—David Horst,
Massillon, Ohio

"[The Web] allows kids to get info for reports without parents having to take them to the library. Saves time, allows them to be more independent when doing school-work. It also gets them more interested."

—Janelle Keri,
Columbus, Ohio

"It is a source of information for school and work. It's like having access to a library from your home."

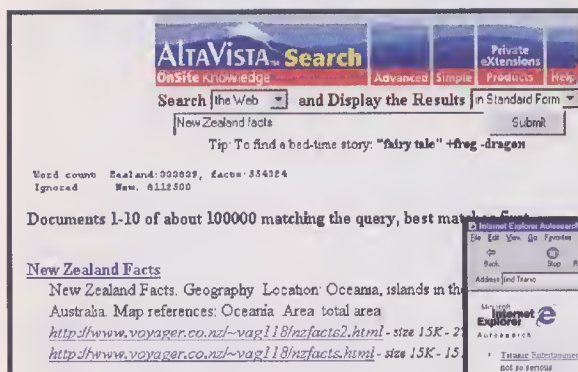
—Mark Kyprianou,
Shrewsbury, Pennsylvania

COLLECT: Search **SMART**

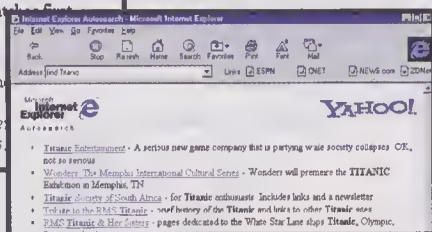
Make the most of search sites on the Web

When starting out on the Web, many families aimlessly browse for sites on everything from automobiles to zoology. After a while, though, they settle into a few favorite haunts and begin going to the Web for specific needs — bug fixes or patches, downloads of favorite programs, specific catalog outlets, financial information, an elusive tax form, pictures of the solar system for a late-night school report, or a reason why the dog turned ill. They want to find what





Find It Now AltaVista and Yahoo are very different: AltaVista's strength is its in-depth searching, while Yahoo excels at indexing.



they need when they need it, and they don't want to spend a lot of time surfing around.

Search directories and search engines are designed to help you find things on the Web. Back in September 1996, our family testers rated nine such sites; four made the grade, earning the *FamilyPC* Recommended seal. The *FamilyPC* guide to smart searching offers a few helpful hints about how to use these sites and save yourself online time finding the things you need, so you'll have more time left over to explore.

Tips for Smart Searches

Browsing a directory is basically a process of clicking through categories. But successful search-engine searches take planning.

► **Use more search words.** The simplest way to focus your search is to use more keywords. Rather than use just *planets* in a search for images of Jupiter, use *planets AND Jupiter AND pictures* (see Learn basic Boolean).

► **Use quotes to enclose phrases.** When you're

searching for a phrase, such as *solar system*, enclose the entire phrase in double (not single) quotation marks.

► **Capitalize names and titles.** When you're searching for names of people and places or titles of movies or books, capitalize them. Most search engines interpret capital letters as a request for an exact case match.

► **Exclude words.** You can exclude a word from a query with a - (minus) sign or the NOT command. This is a handy way to narrow the search results. A query such as *cats NOT dogs*, for instance, ignores pages where both animals are mentioned.

► **Learn basic Boolean.** Don't let the term scare you off. A Boolean search is simply a query with multiple words separated by commands such as AND and OR. (NOT is another Boolean operator.) Whenever you enter more than one search word (such as *medieval superstition*) you're actually creat-

SEARCH SECRET REVEALED

You can change the default search setting on your browser

Both Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer offer built-in access to Web search tools. Navigator's Net Search button takes you to a search site collection where five engines and indexes — Yahoo, AltaVista, Excite, Lycos, and Magellan — are highlighted. You can search using any of these tools (and others). And if your browser supports Java (as version 3.0 of either browser does), you can use Site Sampler to keep a miniature search window on the desktop, so you don't have to constantly return to the engine site itself to do a search.

Internet Explorer's search function is more flexible. Like Navigator, Explorer has a Search button on the toolbar. You can change the default engine by going to the View menu in Windows or the Edit menu on the Mac and selecting Options, clicking on the Navigation tab, picking Search Page from the Page box, and entering the engine's address. Another way to search from Explorer is to type *go* or *find* in the address field and then add one or more search words. By default, Explorer uses the Yahoo directory to find and then display sites. Here, too, you can change Explorer: Download Power Toys, a collection of Windows 95 configuration tools, from www.microsoft.com/windows/common/aa2729.htm to change the default search site Explorer uses with the find command.

—Gregg Keizer

Search Site Checklist

Search sites found

Finding information on the Web is usually a toll-free affair. Our Top 10 list of search sites on the Web (below) includes only advertiser-supported free sites that you can use as much as you want at no cost. If you want specialty search products, there are some you can pay to get. Symantec's Internet FastFind (Windows 95 disk, \$49.95; Symantec, www.symantec.com, 800-441-7234), for example, runs on your desktop and searches the search engines by doing something called a *meta-search*. The Electric Library (www.elibrary.com) is a Web-based archive of information that doesn't really search the Web, but it competes with any of the major search engines for value, ease of use, and depth. It's a great homework helper. For most families, however, free search sites are the way to go.

✓ **Infoseek Guide** (guide.infoseek.com) Our Top Rated FamilyTested search site.

✓ **AltaVista** (altavista.digital.com) In a word: Comprehensive.

✓ **Excite** (www.excite.com) Personalized and localized information.

✓ **Lycos** (www.lycos.com) Good search; great reviews at Point.com.

✓ **Yahoo** (www.yahoo.com) The first, and still among the best.

✓ **Yahooligans** (www.yahooligans.com) A kid-safe place — and the fun home of *FamilyPC* for Kids.

✓ **Magellan** (www.magellan.com) Ratings and reviews; get the green light for kid-safe sites.

✓ **HotBot** (www.hotbot.com) With 54 million pages listed, this site's deep.

✓ **Search.com** (www.search.com) Customizable and broad — C/net's search function gives you a powerful way to search.

✓ **LookSmart** (www.looksmart.com) The *Reader's Digest* version of a search site...literally.

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Check all that apply: What do you print in color? Business presentations ☐ School projects ☐ Greeting cards ☐ Photos ☐

Other (write in) _____

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Do you have a digital camera? yes ☐ no ☐

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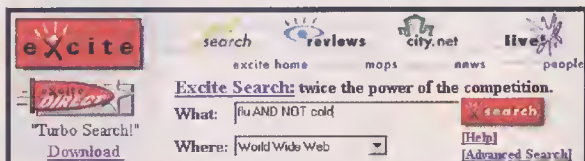
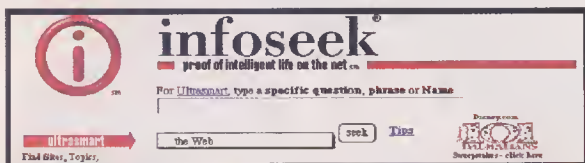
Always Clear, Always Sharp



ing a Boolean query, since most engines invisibly add the OR operator as they comb their databases. Many engines simplify the creation of a Boolean search by letting you pick from menus, but to sharpen your

the Navigator toolbar, letting you search without returning to the Infoseek Guide site.

Tip 2: Infoseek now offers two search services. Ultrasmart returns sites, related topics, even associated news stories, while Ultraseek is a



Add Operators One tip for any search is to use AND, OR, and NOT to tailor your query.

searches, you should at least know that the operator OR returns pages with either of the keywords (i.e., more pages), while the operator AND returns only those pages that include both keywords (i.e., fewer pages).

Each of the *FamilyPC* Recommended search sites works differently, and though the general smart searching tips are helpful, there are more specific ways to maximize each search site.

Infoseek Guide

guide.infoseek.com

FamilyPC Score: 98

Tip 1: Download Quickseek from Infoseek's site. It puts an Infoseek search box right on

lightning-fast searcher that lists only Web sites. Use Ultrasmart most of the time: The related topics often provide paths to information you wouldn't have found.

Altavista

altavista.digital.com

FamilyPC Score: 89

Tip 1: Stick to the Standard or Detailed Form display; the Compact Form doesn't include enough information.

Tip 2: When you're looking for dated material — such as current event news — use the Advanced search and then enter starting and ending dates in the form *dd/mm/yr*.

Excite

www.excite.com

FamilyPC Score: 87

Tip 1: Excite now shows you the number of total "hits" (the pages it's found) and gives a percentage-based relevance ranking beside each site. Even more useful is the More Like This link, which pulls up additional pages.

Basic Boolean Adding operators to narrow a search is easy in Lycos.

Tip 2: To have easy access to Excite all the time, download Excite Direct.

Lycos

www.lycos.com

FamilyPC Score: 86

Tip 1: If you usually search by keywords, don't bother with Lycos Remote Control. Instead, download Lycos QuickSearch, which lets you search from any screen in Navigator and Internet Explorer.

Tip 2: Use Lycos's Custom Search: Its pull-down menus let you painlessly construct complex searches.

Time Well Saved

With most ISPs going to flat-rate pricing, saving time on the Web will no longer save you money in online charges. But as every busy parent knows, saving time from a filled-to-the-minute schedule is a reward in itself.

Gregg Keizer is a *FamilyPC* contributing editor. E-mail him at familypc@aol.com.

Customize Your Search

Search: for:

Search Options:

Display Options:

THE WEB IN REAL LIFE

The other side of the coin: Blocking sites you don't want to find

Families on the World Wide Web concerned about the type of information their children can access are doing something about it. In our Web Families Tell All survey, 62 percent said they set rules for Internet usage in their homes.

You can find the built-in parental controls in Internet Explorer 3.0 by going to View, choosing Options, and then clicking on the Security tab. Click on Settings. You then have a choice of additional tabs for Ratings — General or Advanced. The General Ratings let you block sites rated by RSACi (the Recreational Software Advisory Council) for content like language, nudity, sex, and violence. For each category, you can use a slider bar to set the amount permissible (e.g., violence runs from Level 0: No Violence to Level 4: Wanton and Gratuitous Violence). The problem with this system is that few pages on the Web carry the RSACi ratings.

There are several other products that help parents control Web access, including Cyber Patrol (www.cyberpatrol.com), which we profiled in

January's Makeover; Net Shepherd's DaxHound (www.netshepherd.com); SafeSurf (www.safesurf.com); SurfWatch (www.surfwatch.com); and Cybersitter (www.solidoak.com).

Parents should be aware that while each of these products offers some measure of control over content on the World Wide Web, none are foolproof, because the Web is constantly in flux. Products that block out sites (the CyberNot list in Cyber Patrol, for example) will always miss some sites that are new or not rated. Products that restrict access to only a certain subset of Web sites that have been screened and approved (the CyberYes list in Cyber Patrol) often leave off many appropriate Web sites that have not yet been rated — often those that are the newest and most interesting. *FamilyPC* believes these products are best used by parents who want to set some physical restrictions to sites but who then back them up with discussions about the types of sites that are appropriate and inappropriate and why.

—Joe Panepinto

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Family Web

#1 PAGES

Weave a Web site your family can call home

ONCE YOUR FAMILY HAS CONNECTED, communicated, and searched around a bit online, you may want to make your own mark on the world of the Web by creating a family Web page. Publishing a family Web page gives you and your kids the chance to share information about your favorite hobbies and interests with virtual visitors and far-flung family members who may stop in from all over the world. Consider it a chance to mark your place in cyberspace.

Family Fun The Grallas — Preston, Mia, and Gabe — make Web building a family affair.



Web Testers TELL ALL

How has the Web affected your family life?

"Doing our family Web site brought us together in doing a family project. The Internet has also allowed Dad to work at home and spend more time with the family."

—Susan Teel,
Chugiak, Alaska

"It has allowed more and almost instant contact with others, especially in respect of a small home office. The WWW has opened new doors for contacts to other companies with similar interests."

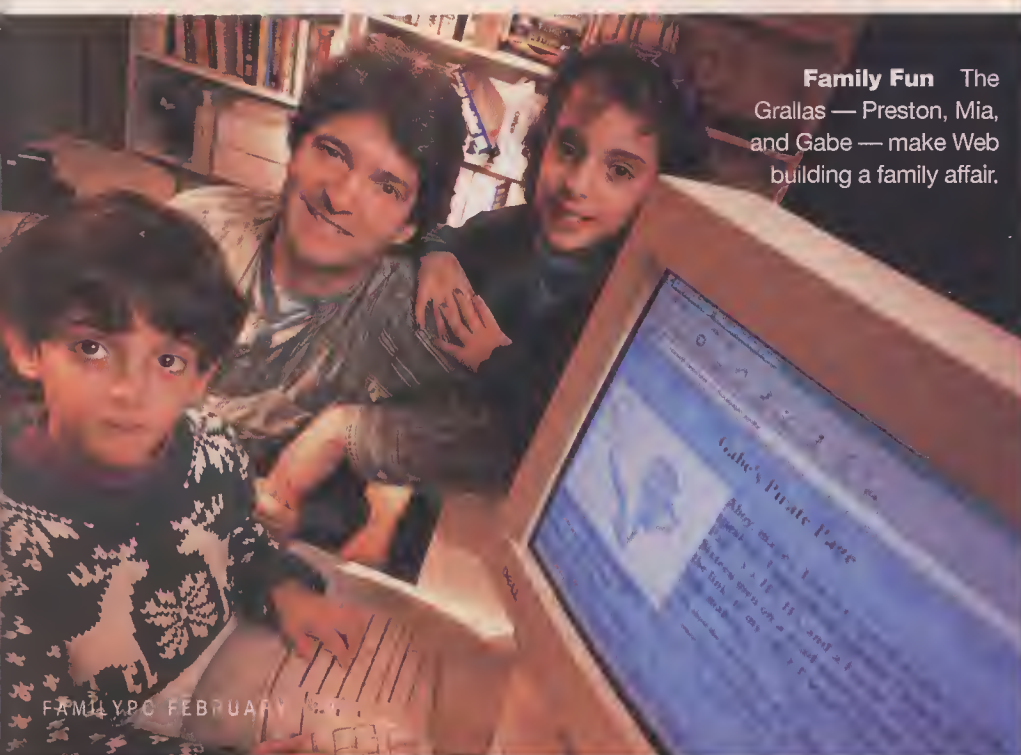
—Bruce Smith,
Keswick, Ontario

"I have changed from a computer-phobe to an Internet consultant."

—Tony Milligan,
San Diego, California

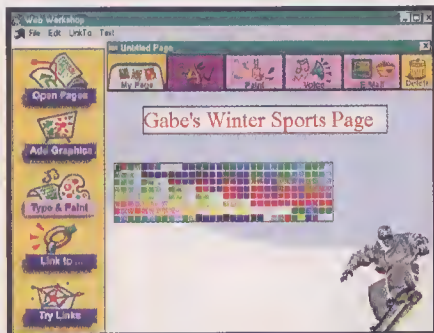
"We spend a lot of time looking at Web sites together. It also gives my 11-year-old and me an interest that we have in common and can talk about. He thinks it is cool that his mom likes the Internet and has her own home page."

—Kim Keith,
Magnolia, Arkansas



But there's more: Since you can create hot links from your page on the Web out to other pages, not only can you tell people about your favorite hobbies and sites, you can also link them directly to places you think they might like. In fact, Web publishing is a lot like desktop publishing: You create pages with a software package that lets you combine text and graphics in an interesting way.

A short time ago, Web publishing meant knowing how to work with HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). But today's Web-page builders — from Web Workshop to



Paint a Web Web Workshop works like a drawing-and-paint program.

Front Page 97 for adults — are almost as family-friendly as your favorite word processor or graphics program.

How Does It Work?

If you're building a simple Web page using any of the products described below or the home-page builder on America Online or CompuServe (see "Personal Web Space"), you don't need to know much about how the Web actually works. But if you're curious about what's going on behind the curtain, check this out:

The Web is built on two foundations: HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol), a set of rules or protocols that defines the way computers communicate with other computers on the Web; and HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), the language that allows you to build pages on the Web that are attractive (with graphics, animations, and formatted text) and link to other Web pages. HTML is a set of tags that are invisible to readers but work to make a Web page attractive and interactive. When you see or build a hot link from one page to another, put bold or italic text in a Web page, or insert a family photo saved in GIF or JPEG format, HTML tags in the document tell it where to link and how to look. Web builders let you turn text and

graphics into HTML pages.

Every page on the Web has its own address, or URL (universal resource locator), such as www.zdnet.com/familypc. Like a street address, a URL is distinct. If you know a page's address (it shows up in the status bar of most browsers), you can link to it to see it or to get to it from a page you're building.

To make the pages you've created available to everyone on the Web, you save them to the server computers of your ISP or commercial service provider and get a URL. That way, people who want to see your home page can connect directly to it.

How Do I Do It?

How you actually go about building a Web page or family Web site varies depending on the software you choose to use. Below, we list your best bets, from the simplest — the first two described below turn Web-page-making into kids' stuff — to the most full-featured and robust.

➤ **Web Workshop.** Web Workshop hides all the messiness of HTML programming and makes building Web pages as simple as building a document using a drawing-and-paint program. The tools in Web Workshop will be familiar to anyone who's used a product like Kid Pix Studio (with drawing and paint tools such as paint brushes and text tools). It also includes tools specific to the Web: You can click on Link to... to add a hot link to another document or site if you know its URL, click on Voice to add sound, or click on E-mail to add a link directly to an e-mail box. You can choose from dozens of background graphics from black holes to books, choose from

What Do I Need?

Get started building your family's home on the Web

There are several ways to build a family Web page, but here's your basic tool kit:

- ☒ A subscription to the Internet via a commercial online service like America Online or an ISP like EarthLink Network (see "Connect: First Step")
- ☒ Server space (in megabytes) where you can store the home page or pages so they are accessible to everyone on the Web
- ☒ Software to build the pages and, if you're connecting via an ISP, some information about your Internet connection, such as your Internet address, an IP (Internet Protocol address) for your server, and usually your user name and password
- ☒ Graphics and images in GIF or JPEG format; text in ASCII format
- ☒ The gumption to go it alone and an openness to learning new skills

more than 300 fun pictures for decoration or hot-linking, or add your own images. When you're ready to publish your pages on the Web, Web Workshop freezes each as one big graphic with hot links in it and then gives you the option of sending it to your ISP's server or publishing it to the Vividus Web site at www.vividpost.com. *Vividus/Sunburst*, 888-484-8438; *Mac and Windows CD*, \$29.95.

PERSONAL WEB SPACE

Commercial services make it easy to put up a Web page of your own

If you haven't left the comfy confines of America Online or CompuServe, you'll find it easy to create a family home page using those services' special tools, templates, graphics, and guidelines.

With America Online, you need to be using version 3.0 to access the new Personal Publisher 2 to create snazzy Web pages with background colors and graphics. Just go to Personal Publisher 2 (Keyword Homepage) and follow the instructions for creating and uploading the page. Your Web address will be [members.aol.com/\[yourname\]/](http://members.aol.com/[yourname]/). If you built your own pages with other Web builder tools, you can upload them and make them available to everyone on the Web (Keyword MyPlace).

CompuServe 3.0 for Windows members can use the CSI Home Page Wizard software. To find it, click on the Internet button on the Main Menu and go to Our World and then to Publish. Download the wizard, which lets you create a page using templates for home or business and drag-and-drop graphics. The publishing wizard will place the page (or pages created with other products) in your private online spot at [ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/\[yourname\]](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/[yourname]).

—Eric Griffith



Sega Rally Championship.™
The arcade racing hit.
Now available on PC.

► **Creative Writer 2.** When you install Creative Writer 2, it asks if you want to install the Web Publishing Wizard. We recommend that you do so. For the extra 1MB of hard disk space you're giving up, you're gaining a way to share your family's creativity with the entire wired world. Click on Web Pages from the New Project interface to get to a series of tutorials and templates.

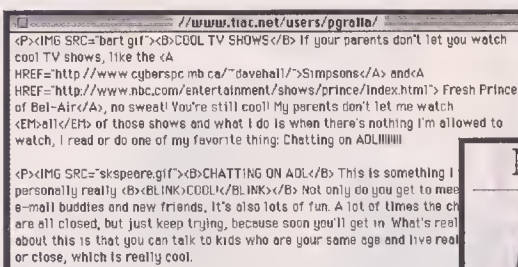
Building a Web page in Creative Writer 2 is not as simple as in Web Workshop. While you can start with a simple template and tweak it to suit what you want, you'll get the most value from the program if you walk through the tutorials for things like Using Page Links (to link within a document), Using Internet Links (to link to other sites), and Adding HTML Tags. If you want to start with a template, you can use all the tools in Creative Writer to jazz up your Web page without worrying about whether it will work on the Web — the program grays out the features you can't use. *Microsoft*, 800-426-9400 or 206-882-8080; *Windows 95 CD*, \$34.95.

Home-based or part-time businesses need to market products and services, and for many professionals and small product marketers, the Web is an effective place to do it. Several companies will create and host your Web site from sketches and pictures that you provide (check out *Easy Site Web Workbook*, \$19.99, from IMV Internet, 408-574-0200). But if you're a do-it-yourselfer who wants a product that will step through the process on the first go-round and then provide high-end tools that will match your own growing skills, here are a couple of

commercial products that stand out:

► **Claris Home Page.** While Claris offers Web-page-building features in its popular ClarisWorks 4.0 productivity package (Mac disk,

Page, Microsoft's Web-page-building offerings for families with a little more experience — FrontPage 97 and Publisher 97 — offer different levels of Web-page-building support. For families looking only for a tool to build a simple Web page or site, the Web Site Wizard in Publisher 97 offers plen-



From This... to This Be glad you're shielded from HTML tags — they look like this (above).

\$129, or Windows disk, \$79; Claris, 800-544-8554), it also offers Home Page 2.0 to the family focused on Web-page publishing. Home Page has built-in tutorials and samples and a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) mode that claims to shield you from HTML and directory issues (to build a Web page, you sometimes have to store the images in one directory and documents in another), but it takes some time to learn. Version 2.0, which was available only in beta at press time, built in some powerful features, such as easy table-building (you drag a tab-delimited text file into it and it automatically creates a table) and support for frames and image maps, but it still lacked the range of templates that would make family Web-page building easy. *Claris*, 800-544-8554; *Mac and Windows 95 disk*, \$79.

► **Microsoft FrontPage 97 and Publisher 97.** Much like ClarisWorks and Claris Home

Mia Explains it All...

Hi! I'm Mia Gralla. I live in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I'm 10, but I know all the when it comes to younger ages. I'm a girl (which you might already know) and this is my home page. A few of my favorite things are ballet and chatting on America Online. But what this home page is really about is all of the you kids need to know (actually, this doesn't have all the stuff you need to know, but a lot of it). So ENJOY!!!!

COOL TV SHOWS If your parents don't let you watch cool TV shows, like the Simpsons and Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, no sweat! You're still cool! My parents don't let me watch all of those shows and what I do is when there's nothing I'm allowed to watch, I read or do one of my favorite thing: Chatting on AOL!!!!!!

CHATTING ON AOL This is something I think is personally really cool only do you get to meet people, e-mail buddies and new friends, it's also lots of fun. A lot of times the chat rooms are all closed, but just keep trying, because soon you'll get in. What's really cool about this is that you can talk to kids who are your same age and live really far away or close, which is really cool.

ty of power and simple-to-alter templates.

If you want to really become a Web site builder, FrontPage 97 supports all the latest multimedia bells and whistles for animated graphics, application development and controls (Active X and Java), and fun effects, while still offering more than 25 modifiable templates. For families that want to build a real Web site for fun or profit (especially those that are already using Microsoft Office products like Microsoft Word, Excel, or PowerPoint), FrontPage 97 is all the power you need. *Microsoft*, 800-426-9400 or 206-882-8080; *Windows 95 CD*; *Front Page 97*, \$149; *Publisher 97*, \$80 street.

Just Do It

Now that you know the basics — how Web publishing works and where to turn for easy-to-use products that can help — you can make building the family home page on the Web your next weekend project.

Preston Gralla is a frequent contributor to *FamilyPC* and the author of *Online Kids: A Young Surfer's Guide to Cyberspace* (John Wiley & Sons) and *How the Internet Works* (ZD Press).

OTHER OPTIONS

More software and shareware for creating cool Web pages

If you're a committed Netscape Navigator user — as nearly 75 percent of Web users are — you can download or purchase Netscape Navigator Gold (www.netscape.com; \$49.95), which includes a Web page builder. The tools in Navigator Gold are similar to the tools available in other programs, and Netscape offers online tutorials to building pages, as well as dozens of templates. Just log on to Netscape's home site with Navigator Gold and, under the File menu, select New Document and From Wizard or From Template. (The forthcoming Netscape Navigator 4.0 builds in the page-editing tools.)

Alternatively, since the first Web sites were rigged together using homemade tools, Web-page building is a fertile area for shareware and freeware. A short list of a few of the most popular would include HotMetal Lite, Hot Dog, and Home Site. They all take more time to learn and tweak than the commercial products, but most are cheaper and all are free to try out. For a wide assortment of rated and downloadable Web-page-builder programs, check out the ZDNet Software Library at www.hotfiles.com and click on the Internet icon.



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it's networkable.



You're sitting at your desk. And you're bored. Bored, bored, bored. Now imagine you're sitting at your desk taking hairpin turns through dirt and mud. Massive bumps send you flying into orbit. And you better anticipate the next curve or you're gonna get to know the side of a mountain a little too well. Ahhh... there's nothing quite like the off-road racing experience of Sega Rally Championship for the PC. There's even head-to-head network play. So, c'mon, you get a little time off for lunch - go find some buddies and let them eat your dust.



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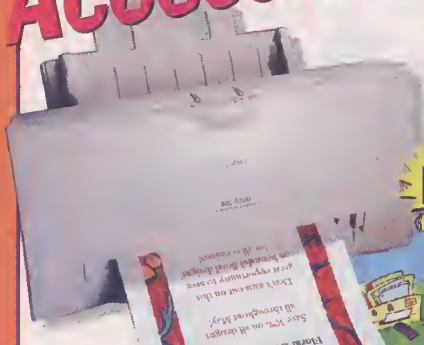
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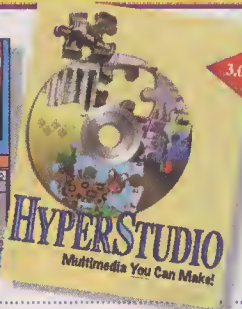
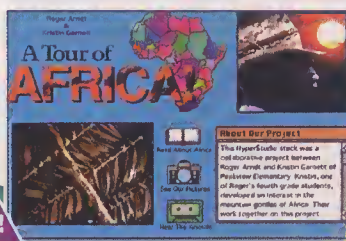
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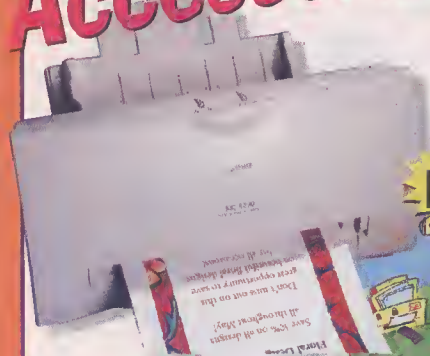


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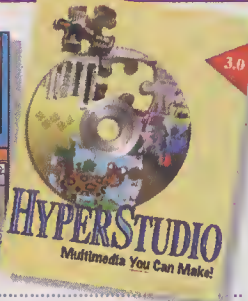
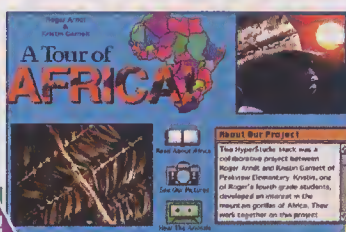
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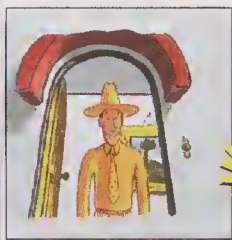
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Photo Magic

Family testers focus on a new breed of photo-editing software

AS COMPUTERS GET MORE POWERFUL, the list of things you can do with them grows. Photo editing — the art of manipulating digital images — was once the domain of high-powered PC systems and expensive and complicated software. Now, a new breed of photo-editing software is designed expressly for families. Behind the simple interface lies sophisticated features that let you do everything from adjust color intensity to apply elaborate special effects. The six packages families tested exhibit technical prowess, but they do it without sacrificing ease of use.

All of the packages make it easy to work with scanned images, images from digital cameras, or images saved in a number of file formats. Photo-editing software lets you remove red-eye; sharpen, blur, stretch, and enlarge parts of an image; crop out unwanted parts of photos; add



ILLUSTRATION: STEPHEN DURKE

captions; and more. In addition to these traditional photo-editing capabilities, you can create personalized photo-based projects — ranging from framed portraits to collages and banners to invitations and calendars. The templates that accompany these programs are designed by professionals and yield professional results even for the nonartistic.

Adobe PhotoDeluxe packs the most into a product with built-in, easy-to-make family projects, plus the capability to create your own projects with a well-rounded selection of image-editing tools. PhotoImpact offers more sophisticated photo-editing functions (with a steeper learning curve) than PhotoDeluxe — clearly a choice for those who intend to become more immersed in photo editing. EasyPhotoReader combines hardware (in the form of a digital photo scanner) with its simple DesignWorks software — a one-stop-shopping solution.

MGI's PhotoSuite is the most ambitious of the products in terms of assorted tools and

effects, but all but the most dedicated will find it overkill. Microsoft's Picture It has fewer photo-editing capabilities than PhotoDeluxe, but it has impressive built-in templates. An online link to Kodak provides an easy way for you to get high-resolution prints of your projects. And for sheer fun, we looked at the one-of-a-kind Kai's Power



Goo, which lets you express your creativity as you apply wacky effects to your favorite family photos.

What are families doing with photo-editing software? You name it. Some want to take a shoebox full of snapshots and organize them on disk. Others like inserting photos into the family newsletter. At *FamilyPC* we have a great time "gooing" the faces of our staff, sending birthday cards and birth announcements, or turning out calendars with a photo on each month. When you work with family photos, the notion of personal computing becomes richer than ever. These products represent the software to get you there.

METHODOLOGY

FamilyTested scores for the software reviewed in this issue are based on the experiences of 747 parents, teachers, and kids. Families used the software for two to four weeks and filled out evaluation forms that we tabulated and analyzed. Programs that score 85 or higher overall receive a *FamilyPC* Recommended seal.

Scores for photo-editing software are based on the following criteria: **Satisfaction** (25%) rates how well testers felt the program performed its specified tasks; **Ease of Use** (20%) rates how easy it is to install and use the program; **Long-Term Value** (20%) rates how long a family said it would use the software; **Features** (35%) rates the quality and quantity of the program's tools.

Scores for education, creativity, and entertainment software are based on the following criteria: **Fun** (30%) rates how much fun a program is, according to kids; **Ease of Use** (20%) rates how easy it is to install and use the program; **Replay Value** (30%) reports how long a family said it would use the software; **Education** (20% for education) judges the educational value of a program according to teachers and parents; **Creativity** (20% for creativity software) rates how well a program inspires a child's creative urges; and **Entertainment** (20% for entertainment) rates the overall game play, graphics, sound, and story line.

Of ABCs and BMPs

Like all aspects of computing, photo editing has its own alphabet soup of acronyms. Some of the most important ones relate to formats in which you can save files. Here is an introduction to common file formats used to save digital images.

BIT MAP

Several file formats, including BMP, PCX, and PICT (on the Mac), store information about bit maps. These simple formats used in paint-style graphics programs are good for storing clip art, but they contain no built-in compression and so produce large files that are not efficient for storing photographs. They are useful for computer art projects like screen savers and wallpaper.

GIF

GIF, or Graphics Interchange Format, was first developed for exchanging graphics on CompuServe. Since it is not tied to any particular

operating system or screen resolution and it stores image information in a compressed form, it is commonly used to store and deliver images over the Internet.

JPEG

JPEG stands for Joint Photographic Experts Group and is named after the folks who developed the standard. It can compress a color image to about one-twentieth of its original size, so it is often used for placing photos on the Web or sending them by e-mail. JPEG is a good format to store digital pictures in, but beware of applying too much compression (which is often selectable off a menu), as it can affect the quality of the image.

TIFF

The Tagged Image File Format was developed by Microsoft and Aldus for storing bit-map graphics. Since you can compress TIFF images and exchange them between DOS/Windows

systems and Macs with relative ease, this is a good file format for storing digital photos.

PHOTO CD

A proprietary format developed by Eastman Kodak, Photo CD lets you store digitized photographic images on a CD-ROM and then read them into a graphics program in one of several resolutions.

FLASHPIX

This new file format, developed by Kodak, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and Live Picture, stores images at very high resolutions. Unlike other high-res formats, however, which need lots of memory and computing horsepower to work with, FlashPix lets you make changes to a low-resolution image, and the changes are applied to the high-resolution image when you save the file. This greatly speeds up what used to be a very slow process and still gives you high-quality printed images.

Photo-Editing Software

Kai's Power Goo



Satisfaction89
Ease of Use88
Long-Term Value88
Features85

Family Feedback

What They'd Pay: \$36

Suggested Ages: 7 and up

KAI'S POWER GOO lets you take images — scanned photographs, Photo CD files, video-capture images — and stretch, smear, nudge, smooth, grow, and shrink them. In short,



Goo Times Power Goo lets you warp the digital world as you see fit.

Power Goo lets you hold up a digital fun-house mirror to any image you place under its spell. That explains why this digital romper room was such a success with the 38 parents and kids who tested it.

The program is a breeze to use once you get a handle on its hip and unique interface, which features two rainbow arcs of colored buttons. Power Goo relies on some sophisticated programming algorithms to make the special effects applied to images take hold in real time as you move your mouse. Most other software forces you to wait as effects are applied.

"I liked the fusion room, because I could put human features on a car," said 12-year-old Jules Kroehl from Littleton, Colorado. As Jules suggests, with Power Goo you can

blend pictures together to send them to even greater heights of deformity. You can also output your series of images as a movie file, which looks like a special effect you might see on MTV.

The program comes with a library of 170 images, including photos of politicians, cartoon characters, and famous paintings, such as the Mona Lisa. The real fun, though, comes when the kids get to see their parents — and the parents get to see their kids — all bent out of shape.

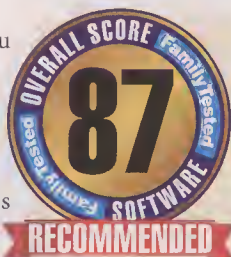
To get your photos into the computer, you can scan them in (or have them scanned

for you, which many copy shops will do); have your film developed by a company that puts them on disk or CD; or use a digital camera. (This procedure is the same for any of the programs reviewed here.)

Some testers complained that the program required 8MB of free RAM to operate, but most had a blast "Gooing" everything in sight. "The technology is incredible, and the kids thought this software was hysterical," said Diane Pease from Exton, Pennsylvania, the mother of Alexandra, age eight.

MetaTools, 800-472-9025 or 805-566-6200; Mac and Windows CD, \$49.95 street.

Adobe PhotoDeluxe



Satisfaction84
Ease of Use83
Long-Term Value86
Features90

Family Feedback

What They'd Pay: \$54

Suggested Ages: 10 and up

AS THE CREATOR of Photoshop, Adobe has long been the king of professional photo-editing software. Now, Adobe sprinkles its magic on families. PhotoDeluxe has many of the capabilities of its powerful profession-



Full-Color Fun PhotoDeluxe has the most features and the greatest flexibility.

al ancestor while hiding the complexities.

How well has Adobe succeeded in making PhotoDeluxe both accessible and useful for a lay market? According to Patricia Scavelli's seven-year-old son Kurt from Colt's Neck, New Jersey, "It was cool making my friends look weird. I bet my grandma would have fun using it, too." Absent are the mind-boggling menus with layer after layer of choices, and the sea of floating palettes common to "high-end" graphics software. In PhotoDeluxe there are mostly buttons to click and steps to follow.

PhotoDeluxe's Guided Activities section is the main entry point to the program. It takes you step-by-step through a range of projects, including cards, flyers, covers, and signs. You can add decorations, frames, and text to your pictures and create professional-looking designs in minutes. If you need to fix a photo, detailed, sequential instructions help you touch it up. You can adjust the colors, get rid of red-eye, and play with the contrast and brightness.

PhotoDeluxe also features the On Your Own section, which lets you experiment with a collection of image-editing tools housed in a friendly interface. Here you can crop, retouch, or restore the look of cherished family photos that are dusty and scratched — or, just for the heck of it, plonk your head onto a movie star's body.

In general, our 40 testers were impressed by Adobe PhotoDeluxe. "This is a great

product to create unusual and fun pictures from existing photos or ones you take," said Mickey Howard from Lincoln, Nebraska. **Adobe**, 800-888-6293 or 408-536-6000; Mac and Windows CD, \$49 street.

PhotoImpact 3.01 with WebExtensions

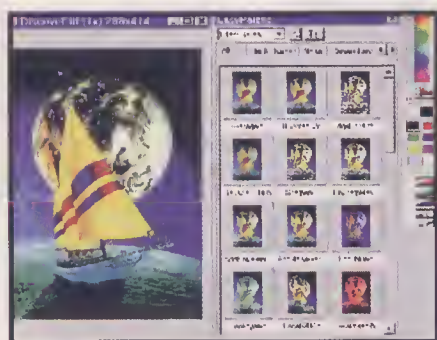


Fun .....	.85
Ease of Use .....	.81
Long-Term Value .....	.89
Features .....	.86

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$80
Suggested Ages: 14 and up

WHETHER PHOTOIMPACT overwhelms you with its considerable capabilities or excites you with its potential, one thing's for sure — it *will* have an impact.

For the most part, our testers agreed with



Lights, Camera, Impact PhotoImpact gives a visual representation of special-effects options.

Art Cole from Woodbridge, Virginia, who said that using PhotoImpact made him feel like "a kid in a candy store."

The reason for Art's bug eyes is that PhotoImpact has so much to offer it's hard to know what to try first. Clearly, it is the most ambitious and comprehensive (and difficult to master) of the products we tested. In brief, however, PhotoImpact consists of a sophisticated photo editor, a multifaceted image manager called the Album, and four utilities.

You can set up PhotoImpact in Basic, Intermediate, or Advanced modes. Each successive mode makes more tools available.

PhotoImpact doesn't guide you through projects step-by-step, like PhotoDeluxe, for example. It does offer help with some basic tasks through its AutoProcess Tools, how-

ever, which automatically straighten, crop, and improve the quality of your photos. If you don't like the results, it's no problem: PhotoImpact has up to 99 levels of undo.

PhotoImpact's interface is very visual, which simplifies many image-editing functions. For example, EasyPalette provides panels of visual samples for special effects, styles, textures, and gradient fills that you can apply to your images with a single mouse click. The program also includes paint and drawing tools.

PhotoImpact Album is no less impressive than the parent program. With it you can manage up to 65,535 thumbnail images in each album; add identifying text; or annotate thumbnails with voice, animation, or video. PhotoImpact also comes with a second CD-ROM called WebExtensions that includes a Web imaging toolkit.

Testers were suitably impressed. While they cautioned that PhotoImpact is not for the faint of heart, they felt the time spent learning it would be repaid through striking images that have a truly personalized touch. "Its easy-to-navigate interface coupled with powerful tools make PhotoImpact an exceptional software package," said John Mlyniec from Rochester, New York.

Ulead's iPhotoExpress, which should be available by the time you read this, will feature similar tools and a family-friendly interface.

Ulead Systems, 800-858-5323 or 310-523-9393; Windows 95 CD, \$99 street.

EasyPhoto Reader with DesignWorks



Satisfaction .....	.83
Ease of Use .....	.85
Long-Term Value .....	.91
Features .....	.84

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$183
Suggested Ages: 19 and up

EASYPHOTO REMOVES one of the biggest obstacles to using photographs on your PC: getting the darn things into it in the first place.

EasyPhoto achieves this by including in its package the EasyPhoto Reader, a color



Scan Package The EasyPhoto hardware/software bundle provides a simple scanning solution.

scanner about the size of a chunky paperback novel, which attaches to your PC's parallel port. You can continue to operate any printer you have attached by using a special connector that comes with the product. (Any of the programs here lets you import images captured using scanners, but testers liked the idea of the inexpensive EasyPhoto hardware/software bundle.)

Scanning a photo is about as complicated as inserting a card into an ATM slot: Aligning it with two guides, you feed the photo in the front (5 by 7 inches is the maximum photo size), and as it comes out the back, the scanned picture appears on your screen. With the accompanying software, you can file your scanned photos into Galleries and then manipulate them in a variety of simple ways.

"It was well packaged," said Keil Morek from Oak Lawn, Illinois, the father of Zak, age six. "The simplicity of the software worked well with the ease of use of the scanner. Even computer-phobic people we showed it to watched and eventually played with the software."

With DesignWorks, the image editor that comes with the EasyPhoto Reader, you can, for example, automatically place photos into frames of different shapes and sizes and then resize and rotate them. Our 26 testers thought this feature, called SmartFrames, was pretty neat and made a very fiddly operation simple.

The program provides a link to Microsoft's WordArt utility (though it doesn't come with WordArt), so you can create some fun text effects to use with your photo design. You can even record and add sounds to your projects. This is useful when using the program's slide-show feature, which lets you create slide shows and send them to friends

and relatives, who can play them back even if they don't have EasyPhoto software.

Testers were underwhelmed by the limited number and poor quality of templates offered; they felt you'd be better off making your own in a separate art program and importing them into DesignWorks. Similarly, the clip art provided is limited in number and variety, although testers found it easy to resize and rotate the artwork.

If you want step-by-step help creating projects, look to PhotoDeluxe. But if, like our testers, you are happy using other resources to adorn your family photos — and you want a very easy way to get photos into your PC and keep them organized — EasyPhoto is a good choice.

Storm Technology, 888-438-3279 or 415-691-6600; Windows CD, \$199.

Picture It



Satisfaction	84
Ease of Use	83
Long-Term Value	86
Features	85

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$33
Suggested Ages: 13 and up

WITH PICTURE IT, you don't need to know a thing about photo editing to make great-looking projects using your family photos; you just need to be good at following directions.

Picture It does most of the work for you. The easy-to-follow interface presents six basic operations in a series of step-by-step tasks. Get It lets you bring a photo into the program. Prepare It lets you edit and add effects. Design It gives you a choice of three types of projects in which to use your photos: photo

collages, greeting cards, and calendars. Frame It lets you add a decorative border. Just Add It gives you online access to Kodak's Web page, where you can download more frames and borders. Share It lets you print, send photos or slide shows to friends electronically, or upload your files to Kodak and have them printed and mailed to you.

Picture It takes the difficulty out of many complex photo-editing operations. For example, in the Change Text Color area you can make the color of any text you use in your project complement the colors in your picture. All you have to do is click on a color in the picture you want the text to be and watch as Picture It performs its magic.

One of Picture It's slickest capabilities is its Smart Edge Finder, which is the best solution among the photo-editing programs reviewed here to trace parts of a photo. This makes it easier, for example, to cut the kids out of a photo with a dull background and place them against a more appealing one. The product also has a technical advantage in its use of a new file format called FlashPix, which allows you to obtain extremely high resolution output if you have access to special printers like the ones provided in the link to Kodak.

Included on the CD-ROM are hundreds of backgrounds, frames, collages, and templates for major occasions from baby showers to holidays. There are also Kodak-designed templates you can personalize and use with your own photos. You can send your finished files to Kodak via the Internet, and for between \$5 and \$20, Kodak will print the files on photographic paper or create custom gifts such as wine labels, video covers, and photo albums.

Another advantage of the FlashPix file format is that it saves any edits you make as a separate but linked file. This means you can make changes without altering the original photo. So if you have added text to a photo, you can later reopen the file and just remove the text "layer" and change the message without affecting anything else.

While they at times yearned to be able to freely edit their photos, most testers appreciated Picture It's capable guidance and for the most part were pleased with the results.

"The tools were easy to use," said Tami Percle from McLean, Virginia,

the mother of Tyler, age six. "Picture It is great and will be very useful as we use digital photography more and more."

Microsoft, 800-426-9400 or 206-882-8080; Windows CD, \$79.95.

MGI PhotoSuite

Overall: 82 (Satisfaction: 83; Ease of Use: 74; Long-Term Value: 85; Features: 84)

Family Feedback What They'd Pay: \$48; Suggested Ages: 12 and up

MGI PHOTOSUITE PROVIDES you with an impressive collection of tools to edit, capture, catalog, and transform your photos. And that, according to our testers, proved to be its downfall: They felt it had too many options for most families. PhotoSuite does



Sweet and Sour PhotoSuite has tons of tools but a steep learning curve.

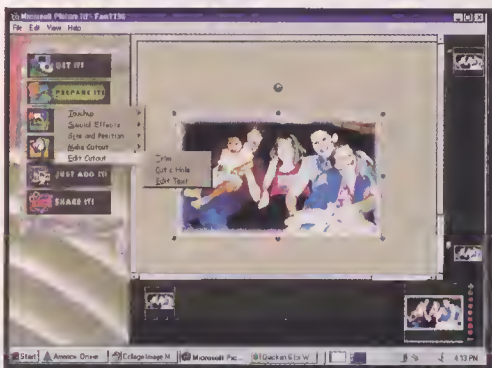
indeed boast a considerable range of capabilities: photo editing and effects; image capture (grabbing an image from your computer screen); photo slide show; and photo album and cataloger for organizing photos.

PhotoSuite has quite a few sophisticated tools to apply to images. With the Lens Effect Kit, for example, you can create effects such as fog, smoked glass, glamour, sepia, moonlight, tan, and more. Other special effects include emboss, mirage, swirl, mosaic, and splatter. You can even add word balloons to photos.

Our 25 testers said the Album feature is great for managing photos and that the card, poster, and calendar templates were very good, especially for children. But for busy families, they felt PhotoSuite was too much of a good thing. "This is a good product if you intend to do a lot of work with pictures and photo alterations," said Gregory Grant from Lincoln, Nebraska, the father of Cara, age 11. "But as an everyday tool, it's excessive."

MGI Software, 888-644-7638 or 905-764-7000; Mac and Windows CD, \$49.95 street.

Picture This An online link to Kodak gives you high-quality output options.



Education and Creativity

Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego 3.0



Fun	87
Ease of Use	92
Replay	89
Education	89

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$38
Suggested Ages: 8 and up

ALTHOUGH IT SEEMS THAT NO ONE will ever keep pace with super-crook Carmen Sandiego, Broderbund is going all out to keep pace with the demands of players for cool-



Carmen Get It A new interface and large database will keep crime fighters happy.

er multimedia, enhanced game play, and more educational content.

Gone are the static backgrounds of former versions. Instead, junior crime-fighting takes place inside 360-degree panoramas with beautifully detailed backgrounds. This gives kids more of a videogame feel.

For the first time, the program features a real "Chief," represented by the video personage of Lynne Thigpen, who plays the same character on the PBS television version of the game.

ACME Good Guides, also making their first appearance in this CD-ROM, are animated characters who take players on guided tours and provide them with interesting geographical and cultural facts. Each Good

Guide covers a particular area of interest reflected by their names. For example, Dee Plomassy, fluent in 17 languages, is an expert in political systems and economies.

Also notably new is an extensive database covering 50 countries. It features essays from the National Geographic Society, as well as flags, maps, videos, and photographs. Kids can access the database at any time during the game.

The sleuthing that is the heart of Carmen Sandiego is essentially unchanged: Carmen and her 39 henchmen steal unlikely objects — like Mahatma Ghandi's glasses or the key to China's Forbidden City — and it is your job to catch the dastardly deed-doers by traveling to various countries based on clues you gather from questioning tourists or from objects you find along the way.

The clues must also describe the crook's appearance, which you need to know in order to get a warrant issued for his arrest. For example, during one assignment a slip from a dry cleaner says, "Widen pants waistline by six inches," giving a sizable clue about your quarry's girth.

As your child asks questions, he can't help but learn things — for example, that Bahasa Indonesia is a Mayalan language that uses Arabic, Portuguese, Chinese, Dutch, Spanish, and English words.

Our 34 testers put all the clues together and determined that this new version of Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? is the best yet.

"This is the third version of Carmen Sandiego we've owned and it keeps getting better," said Joseph Madsen from Newton, Massachusetts, the father of Miriam, age eight. **Broderbund**, 800-521-6263 or 415-382-4700; Mac and Windows CD, \$39.95; ages 9 and up.

Pizza Pi Kids learn fractions and more in Interactive Math Journey.

Interactive Math Journey



Fun	88
Ease of Use	88
Replay	89
Education	84

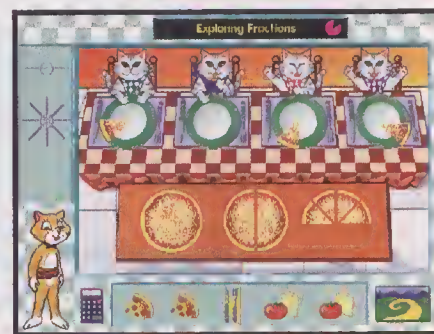
Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$45
Suggested Ages: 5 to 10

TALLYCAT IS YOUR CHILD'S guide through a colorful, animated learning environment. Interactive Math Journey contains a full curriculum — 25 sequenced activities — designed to move kids from basic math, including addition and subtraction, to more advanced concepts and skills, such as fractions and place value.

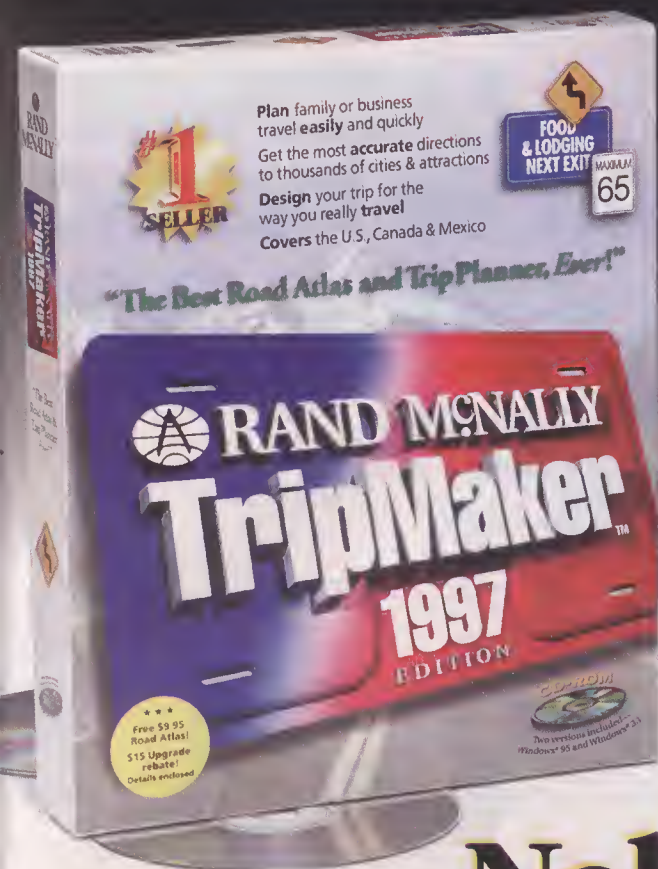
Underlying the pursuit of math skills is Tally's quest for the elusive Math Magician. As your child helps the counting cat in this task, she visits 10 Math Lands, two each for Patterns & Shapes, Addition & Subtraction, Measurement, Fractions, and Multiplication. Your child earns a souvenir when she completes a Math Land that enables her to move on to the next Land.

In Level 1, concepts are explained through interactive stories called Math Tales. In one, called "More or Less — A Sugarcane Mess," your child must help Simon the sugarcane farmer carry just the right number of sugarcane stalks. Kids then move into Math Explorations, hands-on activities that further reinforce these concepts.

"The children had a lot of fun playing with the shape and pattern quilts," said



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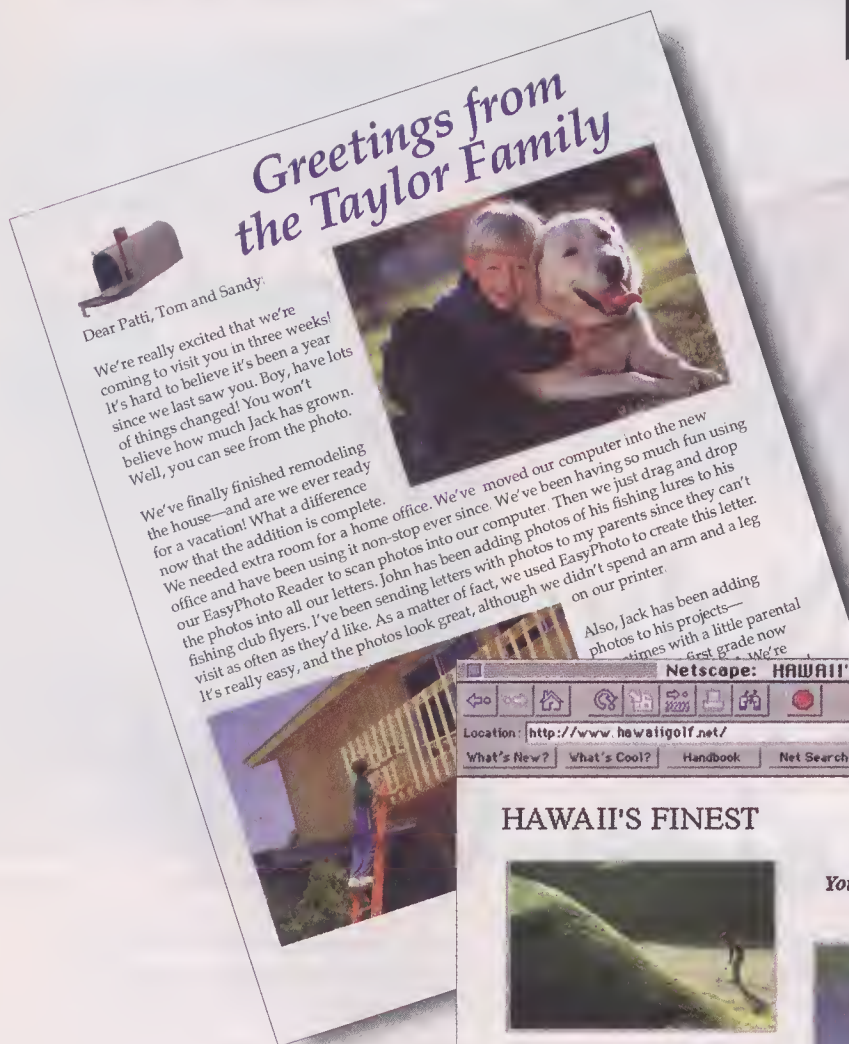
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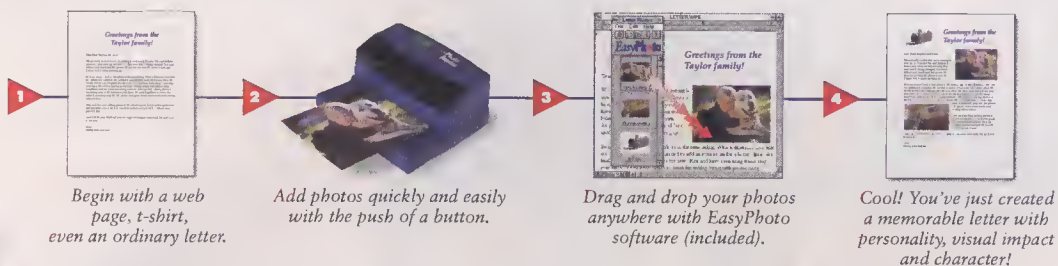
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Suzanne Biga from Eatontown, New Jersey, the mother of Brian, six, and Stephen, four. "It was fun for me because they learned about unfamiliar shapes and pattern symmetry." In this activity, called Quilting Bee, your child manipulates triangles, squares, oblongs, polygons, and other shapes to make a quilt that matches the half that's already completed.

The five Level 2 Math Lands each feature a Math Challenge. In one, kids must figure out the height of the passengers and fit them into train cars. Level 2 activities include filling in holes in an igloo with geometric shapes, and working with fractions to fill glasses with juice.

The program features a progress report for parents. Two bags of plastic shapes and an activity book let your child continue his learning away from the computer.

All in all, our 42 testers were very impressed by how well-planned and pleasing this journey proved.

"Interactive Math Journey is wonderful in helping develop basic math skills," said teacher Valerie Battcher from Louisville, Kentucky. "It has many activities that provide a building block of knowledge in math."

The Learning Company, 800-852-2255 or 510-792-2101; Mac, Windows, and Windows 95 CD, \$90 street; ages 5 to 9.

Highlights Interactive



Fun .....	.88
Ease of Use .....	.94
Replay .....	.85
Education .....	.81

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$28
Suggested Ages: 5 to 12

THE PERENNIALY POPULAR *Highlights* magazine is found, it seems, in every doctor's waiting room and in most homes with young children. Now it goes digital in this entertaining CD-ROM, which includes all of the magazine's most popular sections.

"I thought the hidden-picture activity was pretty neat, although some of them were pretty tricky," said nine-year-old Clayton Bahn from St. Louis, Missouri.

Twenty Hidden Pictures activities are included. The documentation tells us they enhance attention and visual discrimination, but let's not be coy — Hidden Pictures are a lot of fun. Objects in the black-and-white

pictures are colored in when you find them, and some animate. The entire picture animates when you've found all the objects. With a click you can color or clear the picture or receive a hint (try that with the magazine).

In the Timbertoes activity, kids develop sequencing skills by putting the pages of Timbertoes comics in the correct order. Your child can also create his own Timbertoes pages through a special link to the program's paint module.

Highlights Interactive also features 10



Living the Highlights This digital offshoot of the magazine pleased kids and parents.

rebus stories and more than 100 riddles and Headwork questions. In the Science Center, your child can learn interesting facts about creatures and everyday objects, such as why a dog pants. If you have an America Online account, your child can post his artwork on the Highlights site.

Our 30 testers felt that this digital magazine highlighted new ways to enjoy an old favorite as well as pick up some valuable skills along the way.

"Children are provided with many choices within the six program areas," said Arlene Marszałowicz, a teacher from Middletown, New Jersey. "Reading skills are emphasized in an entertaining way, and curiosity and creativity are stimulated, too."

Creative Multimedia, 800-262-7668 or 503-241-4351; Mac and Windows CD, \$29.95; ages 5 to 12.

The Magic Applehouse



Fun .....	.85
Ease of Use .....	.89
Replay .....	.87
Education .....	.87

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$26
Suggested Ages: 5 to 9

ABIGAIL APPLESEED may look like an old biddy from a bygone day, but when your child checks out her house, he'll find that she's hip to the times. In particular, Abby is hip to high-tech. She has a computer, a Web site, and plenty of digital savvy, which she wants to pass along to your child.

Through 16 games and activities, your child helps Abby conduct her apple business, and in so doing he is gently but practically introduced to word processing, databases, and spreadsheets as well as reading, writing, math, and design skills.

This real-world approach to learning about software applications is appealing. In making an ad to advertise her apple pies, tarts, and strudel, for example, your child drags clip art onto a page and learns how to copy, paste, and insert text. Later an order is requested online, and Abby goes to her computer and introduces your child to databases to maintain inventory.

Elsewhere your child is introduced to folders through a game in which he must drag pictures to folders bearing the name of an object, such as a ball or a snake.

Testers said some on-screen explanations took too long, but overall they felt Abigail and her apple business could make learning

An Apple a Day Magic Applehouse teaches kids the basics of core computer programs.



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What They'd Pay: \$26
Suggested Ages: 5 to 9

THE PERENNIALY POPULAR *Highlights* magazine is found, it seems, in waiting room and in most homes of children. Now it goes digital, containing CD-ROM, which includes the magazine's most popular sections.

"I thought the hidden-pictures game was pretty neat, although some were pretty tricky," said nine-year-old John Bahn from St. Louis, Missouri.

Twenty Hidden Pictures are included. The documentation enhances attention and visual discrimination, but let's not be coy — Hidden Pictures is a lot of fun. Objects in the black

pictures are colored in when you find them, and some animate. The entire picture animates when you've found all the objects. With a click you can color or clear the picture or receive a hint (try that with the magazine).

In the Timbertoes activity, kids develop sequencing skills by putting the pages of Timbertoes comics in the correct order. Your child can also create his own Timbertoes pages through a special link to the program's paint module.

Highlights Interactive also features 10



Living the Highlights This digital offshoot of the magazine pleased kids and parents.

rebus stories and more than 100 riddles and Headwork questions. In the Science Center, your child can learn interesting facts about creatures and everyday objects, such as why a dog pants. If you have an

The Magic Applehouse



Fun85
Ease of Use89
Replay87
Education87

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$26
Suggested Ages: 5 to 9

ABIGAIL APPLESEED may look like an old biddy from a bygone day, but when your child checks out her house, he'll find that she's hip to the times. In particular, Abby is hip to high-tech. She has a computer, a Web site, and plenty of digital savvy, which she wants to pass along to your child.

Through 16 games and activities, your child helps Abby conduct her apple business, and in so doing he is gently but practically introduced to word processing, databases, and spreadsheets as well as reading, writing, math, and design skills.

This real-world approach to learning about software applications is appealing. In making an ad to advertise her apple pies, tarts, and strudel, for example, your child drags clip art onto a page and learns how to copy, paste, and insert text. Later an order is requested online, and Abby goes to her computer and introduces your child to databases to maintain inventory.

Elsewhere your child is introduced to folders through a game in which he must drag pictures to folders bearing the name of



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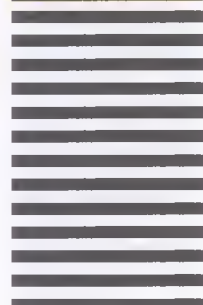
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FAMILYTESTED SOFTWARE

basic computer applications very appetizing for young entrepreneurs.

"The Magic Applehouse is very timely," said Ann Wong from Cypress, California, the mother of Amanda, age eight. "Many families have home businesses now, so it's very appropriate to have software like this. The children can gain an understanding of what their parents do in a business that they run out of their home."

Thomson Learning Tools, 800-354-9706 or 513-527-6285; *Mac and Windows CD*, **\$39.95**; ages 5 to 10.

Stickybear's Reading Fun Park



Fun	83
Ease of Use	92
Replay	86
Education	83

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$20
Suggested Ages: 4 to 7

STICKYBEAR, ONE OF THE classic educational software characters from the early days (the late '80s), invites kids to join him at the fairground to discover just how much fun learning reading and phonics skills can be. Stickybear's Reading Fun Park contains four activities that you can customize in many ways.

Matching Mansion features a haunted house whose shuttered windows are used to play the memory game. Memory Mansion has seven levels of play that feature pictures only, pictures and words, simple nouns, rhyming words, sight words, and beginning and ending consonants.

In Word Wheel, a Ferris wheel spins and your child must complete a word by click-



Stickybear Business The activities may be simple, but kids gave Stickybear a thumbs-up.

ing on the car containing the correct word part or word. Whack a Word helps kids practice reading and phonics as they whack words, such as those that start with the letter *m*.

In the Information Booth, you can view a report card to assess your child's progress in each activity.

Our 38 testers felt Fun Park could be a valuable tutor for any early reader. They felt that if your child already likes Stickybear in any of his other incarnations, he'll probably be particularly receptive to this CD-ROM's lessons.

"Stickybear Reading Fun Park captured students' attention," said Yoli Clark, a teacher from Mound, Minnesota. "I have a Russian student who speaks no English, yet the haunted house concentration game and the shooting gallery vocabulary games were great for him as well as for enriching the skills of others."

Optimum Resource, 800-327-1473 or 803-689-8000; *Mac, Windows, and Windows 95 CD*, **\$59.95**; ages 4 to 8.

CyberCrafts: Digital Lab



Fun	82
Ease of Use	82
Replay	87
Education	88

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$33
Suggested Ages: 10 and up

CONTAINING A TOOLBOX with over 100 components, a mini workbench, and a CD-ROM, Digital Lab is the epitome of "hands-on" software. Its fun, high-tech interface and color animations introduce kids to the basics of digital technology beginning with the question, "What is electricity?" Your child is also introduced to the components he will be using to make any of 20 projects, which include a light sequencer and a random-number generator. The 3-D animated components take on personalities and explain how they work. For example, the Piezo Transducer tells us that it changes electricity to sound waves (which are the source of the beeps and buzzes in computer games and alarm clocks). The CD-ROM also lets kids discover how every-



Let's Get Digital Kids learn to build real electronic devices in Digital Lab.

day items work, from computers to satellites. It features a few games, including a binary number game.

Testers found Digital Lab fun and informative, but a few became impatient at the complexity of some workbench projects. "It was a great way to introduce electronics to kids; most never get a chance to explore the subject at this level," said Joe Lum, a teacher from Buena Park, California. "But there are a lot of steps to complete a project."

Phillips Media, 800-883-3767 or 310-444-6500; *Mac and Windows CD*, **\$44.99**; ages 8 and up.

Reader Rabbit's Reading Development Library 4

Overall: 83 (Fun: 81; Ease of Use: 90; Replay: 86; Education: 77)

Family Feedback What They'd Pay: \$32; Suggested Ages: 4 to 7

IN THIS FOURTH INSTALLMENT of The Learning Company's early reading series, your child explores the stories of King Midas and the Ugly Duckling from several angles. After selecting which of the stories to read, your child chooses one of three points of view from which to have the story told (in King Midas the story is told by Sam the Lion, Merrigold, or King Midas). Your child can also choose to follow along as the story is narrated by characters, read independently, or read aloud with highlighted text.

Our 33 testers found the multiple points of view valuable in teaching kids about different perspectives. "This type of rereading helps to build confidence while developing reading and comprehension skills," said Carol Batchelder, a teacher from Narragansett, Rhode Island. Overall, however, testers wanted more stories on a disc, felt the

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graphics were starting to look a little dated, and thought the stories seemed a bit long. **The Learning Company**, 800-852-2255 or 510-792-2101; *Mac and Windows CD*, \$25 street; ages 5 to 8.

The Treehouse

Overall: 83 (Fun: 84; Ease of Use: 83; Replay: 84; Education: 82)

Family Feedback What They'd Pay: \$35; Suggested Ages: 5 to 8

THE TREEHOUSE is a fun, informative place for first- and second-graders to clamber up into to gain a grounding in aspects of reading, science, math, and music. Its colorful, animated interface guides your child as, for example, he learns the parts of a sentence in Bug Theater by arranging words and phrases in logical order. He then hears the sentence read, watches it performed on stage, and can print it out. Elsewhere your child learns about addition and coin value and animal facts. Other activities let kids explore pitch and rhythm, instrument sounds, and musical styles, and how to make things froth, amplify, and bubble using household items.

Testers said The Treehouse could teach kids a variety of facts and some skills useful to their general education, but they felt its design didn't make it particularly well suited as a comprehensive educational tool. One tester pointed out inaccuracies in the program's science sections. For example, it says the kestrel (American falcon) is a nocturnal bird. "The music activities were probably the best," said Lisa Bishop, a teacher from Columbia, Maryland, "But I think kids will lose interest in this pretty quickly."

Broderbund, 800-521-6263 or 415-382-4700; *Mac and Windows CD*, \$29 street; ages 5 to 8.

Snoopy's Campfire Stories

Overall: 82 (Fun: 80; Ease of Use: 89; Replay: 82; Education: 79)

Family Feedback What They'd Pay: \$26; Suggested Ages: 4 to 7

CHARLIE BROWN and his Peanuts pals invite your youngster to join in their camping fun and then help them write home. First, your child chooses a Peanuts character and listens to him recounting his day. As the character tells his story sitting around a crackling campfire, Snoopy dutifully takes notes on his

laptop. Sally's day, for example, involves a fine bug-hunting trip, which your child then gets to take part in. In the game, your child has to collect five bugs by clicking on one of four Peanuts characters at the moment the bug you need is in range of their net.

With the activities complete, the program takes your child to the letter-writing page. "It just might inspire a child to write to Grandma using a bit of color," said Lori Niles, a teacher from Buffalo, Kansas. "It shows letters to be more creative than 'How are you? I am fine.'" But while our 45 testers recognized that the program can build reading comprehension and develop letter-writing skills, they felt it was a bit slow-moving, didn't allow editing of letters for real originality, and needed a greater variety of activities.

Virgin Sound and Vision, 800-814-3530 or 310-246-4666; *Mac and Windows CD*, \$29.95; ages 4 to 8.

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers Print Kit

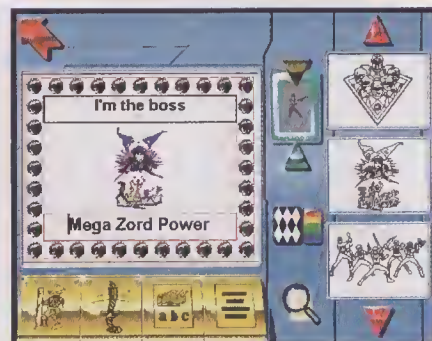
Overall: 81 (Fun: 86; Ease of Use: 92; Replay: 71; Creativity: 81)

Family Feedback What They'd Pay: \$20; Suggested Ages: 5 to 11

WITH PRINT KIT, fans of the Power Rangers can use over 200 images to create signs, cards, notes, posters, calendars, invitations, stationery, and business cards. Creating an item couldn't be easier: Just select a format, click to select a central image — one of the Power Rangers or an associated graphic — and then add a border and a couple of lines of text. In Page Layout mode, kids can rearrange the text and images a couple of ways, although our 23 testers were disappointed that they didn't have more freedom to manipulate the look of a piece.

On the other hand, they did like the voice-assisted interface in which objects are identified simply by moving the mouse over them. "I like the design of the program," said Marty Hein from Lincoln, Nebraska, the father of Kraig, eight, "but it would be more useful if the clip art were more varied. I can only handle so much Power Ranger stuff."

Inventive, but Uninspiring InventorLabs has great info but didn't hold kids' attention.



Power Overload Testers wanted more flexibility from this print package.

Saban Entertainment, 310-235-5100; *Mac and Windows CD*, \$20 street; ages 5 and up.

InventorLabs

Overall: 81 (Fun: 78; Ease of Use: 86; Replay: 80; Education: 84)

Family Feedback What They'd Pay: \$34; Suggested Ages: 9 and up

IN VISITING THE RE-CREATED laboratories of inventors Thomas Alva Edison, James Watt, and Alexander Graham Bell, kids can learn about some of the world's greatest inventions. The interface lets kids examine inventions from many angles. They can review over 100 historical films, photographs, original recordings, and patent drawings; study scrapbooks and mementos; and discover basic principles of technology. Teachers, like Ron Zehnder from Prospect, Kentucky, raved about the disc. "InventorLabs is educational and interesting," he said. "Any child with scientific inquisitiveness will spend hours with this software." Several kids and parents, however, said it wasn't much fun and wouldn't get played much.

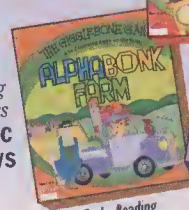
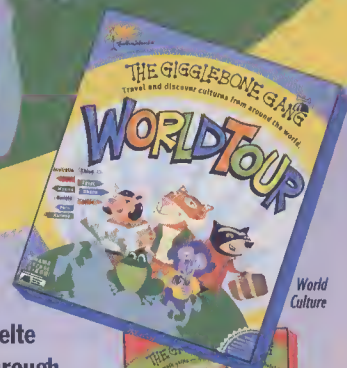
Houghton Mifflin Interactive, 800-829-7962 or 617-351-3333; *Mac and Windows CD*, \$39.95; ages 11 and up.



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Chess Mates



Fun90
Ease of Use93
Replay90
Entertainment93

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$34
Suggested Ages: 8 and up

IF YOU THOUGHT CHESS was a stuffy old game played by grumpy old fellas in the park, Chess Mates has some moves to show you.

The program is built on a colorful, cartoon-style interface with animated pieces



Chess Masterpiece Chess Mates got cheers all around from family testers.

and multiple difficulty levels. Purple-robed Wigby the Wizard guides your child step-by-step in the ways of this ancient game.

"Chess Mates is the best chess teacher I've ever seen," said Esther Giller, mother of eight-year-old Charlie Hankin and 12-year-old Joe Hankin from Cockeysville, Maryland. "It served the needs of my younger son, who is just beginning to play chess, and of my middle son, who has played chess for six years and plays weekly at school. This software was still challenging for him, and he learned new things from it."

Chess Mates is divided into three sections. After watching an animated overview of the game, your child can go to the Learn section to learn how each piece moves and captures, plus several basic game principles, such as setting up the board, castling, and checkmate.

The 50 puzzles and tutorials in the Puz-

zles section teach your child a range of classic playing tactics, such as the fork, pin, and skewer. Chess Mates explains pin, for example, by showing a knight guarding a maiden. When a dragon comes along, the knight must stand his ground and "take the heat" so that the maiden can escape. Through three examples and eight puzzles your child then plays out the pin scenario in real chess situations.

Multiple background settings, including a cityscape, a ship, and a castle, help spice up the game play. Ten levels of difficulty guarantee your child plenty of challenges as he grows in mastery of the game. A progress report lets your child know just how much he has learned (certificates reward his good performance).

Our 32 testers were bowled over by how effectively Chess Mates' entertaining approach teaches this endlessly appealing game to a new generation of players.

"My son is a chess player and has used four or five different programs. This one seems to be the most fun to play and teaches useful techniques in an entertaining way," said Tami Percle from McLean, Virginia, mother of Tyler, age six. "While it is intended for ages nine to 10, younger kids interested in chess will get a lot out of it, too."

Brainstorm, 888-427-2467 or 714-553-6655; Mac and Windows CD, **\$29.95 street**; ages 9 and up.

Fisher-Price Great Adventures Pirate Ship



Fun87
Ease of Use91
Replay85
Entertainment86

Family Feedback
What They'd Pay: \$30
Suggested Ages: 4 to 9

BURIED TREASURE, games, and songs are all there for the finding in this high-seas adventure for young seafarers. Capt. Stubbs has



Ship Shape Kids liked the silly antics in Great Adventures Pirate Ship.

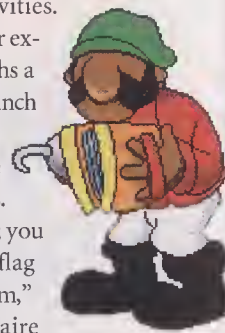
torn up the pieces of his treasure map and now can't find where he put them. It's up to your child to hunt through this colorful pirate ship to recover the pieces and find the treasure.

Ten treasure maps and two sets of pirates provide 20 scenarios to solve with Pirate Ship. Finding the pieces means clicking on everything in sight, of course. In fact, simply moving your mouse around the screen sometimes sets fun into motion: In one place, a deck plank pops up on a plume of water — and carries a piece of the map into view.

During the course of his search aboard this colorful galleon your child is sure to happen upon games and activities. Clicking on a piano, for example, not only unearths a map piece, it can also launch your child into a fun sing-along with the friendly crew members.

"The games are fun; you can make your own flag and see it in the bedroom," said four-year-old Claire Willingham from Prospect, Kentucky. "It is fun to dig up the treasure because all the pirates come out and clap."

In the game that Claire enjoyed, your child can make wacky skull-and-crossbones flags, where the crossed bones could be golf



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clubs and the skull wears an earring.

In similar fashion, your child can build a ship in a bottle by changing components. The hull, for example, can be a bathtub or a gondola or a purple shoe.

Our 20 testers enjoyed all the antics onboard this pirate ship, including printing colorable pictures of the pirates.

"Both my eight- and 10-year-old loved it. It really kept them occupied looking for the puzzle pieces," said Robin Gitlitz from West Newton, Massachusetts. "It challenged them, and they were excited to play."

Davidson & Associates, 800-545-7677 or 310-793-0600; *Mac and Windows CD*, **\$29.95**; ages 4 to 8.

Mooky Takes Manhattan

Overall: 81 (Fun: 85; Ease of Use: 83; Replay: 76; Entertainment: 82)

Family Feedback What They'd Pay: \$22; Suggested Ages: 4 to 9

IN THIS COLORFUL CD-ROM, kids explore New York City with Mooky and his monster friends. Mooky's Big Apple looks vaguely familiar. Staying at the Plasma Hotel, they visit the Vampire State Building, the Boobert Theater, the Monster of Liberty, the Monsterpolitan Museum, FAO Wartz, Gloomindales, Shockefeller Center, and Slimes Square. From the foregoing itinerary, you get a good idea that this is a disc with a monstrous sense of humor.

"It's a nice program — with a lot of activities that your child can work on without assistance," said Marion Greene, a teacher from Pacific Palisades, California. "It's very intuitive and easy for a child to explore. I liked the humor."

The wackiness continues at each of the stops: At the Vampire State Building, kids get to change the weather, while assembling jigsaw puzzles of monsterpieces is the order of the day at the Monsterpolitan Museum.

The Photo Album lets kids shoot and save their favorite New York scenes. Testers thought the graphics were gorgeous and some of the antics a hoot. They just doubted they'd hoot at it



Monster Mission Kids take Mooky and friends on a goofy tour of Manhattan.

more than once or twice. "Mooky Takes Manhattan is a novel idea that's fun for kids, but I have doubts about its longevity," said Elisa Kapzell, a teacher from Pacific Palisades, California.

Simon & Schuster Interactive, 800-910-0099 or 212-698-7000; *Windows 95 CD*, **\$19.95**; ages 5 to 8.

The Amazing World of Busy Kids

Overall: 74 (Fun: 69; Ease of Use: 83; Replay: 75; Entertainment: 71)

Family Feedback What They'd Pay: \$15; Suggested Ages: 4 to 6

THIS CD-ROM LETS KIDS take part in eight activities in two worlds called Busy Kids Wonderland and Busy Betsy Fantasy. Both worlds have three similar environments: Explore (hot spots to click on), Four Colorful Puzzles (jigsaw puzzles from six to 56 pieces), and Make-a-Movie (in which your child places simple pictures in eight frames of a filmstrip and plays them back). Busy Kids Wonderland also has Quest Adventure Game, in which kids click on icons to activate objects — such as a key to open a door — to advance to the next screen; Busy Betsy Fantasy also has an object-matching game. Our testers thought Busy Kids cute in places but overall lacking in the quality of today's leading software. "Busy Kids is a very basic program that has limited replay value,"

said Diana Bailey from Rolling Hills, California, the mother of Katherine, three. "It should have more activities."

Microforum, 800-685-3863 or 416-656-6406; *Windows CD*, **\$22.95**; ages 3 and up.



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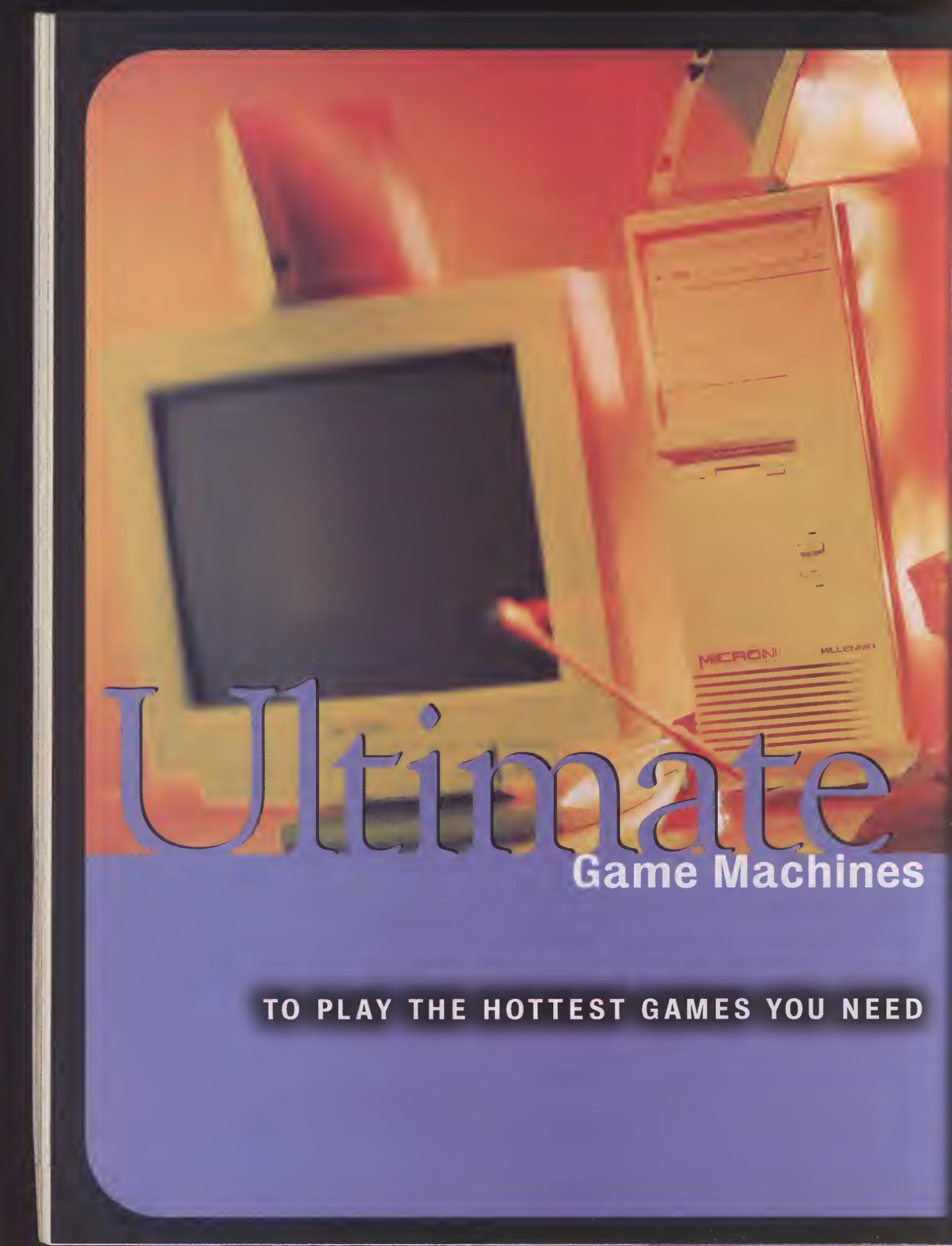
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Ultimate
Game Machines

TO PLAY THE HOTTEST GAMES YOU NEED



FAMILYTESTED **HARDWARE**

by Steve Apiki

NO OTHER TYPE OF SOFTWARE makes more demands on your PC than a game does. If your system can meet these demands, the reward is game play so realistic you start to believe you're careening around a race track or battling aliens on the far side of the galaxy. This month, we test four multimedia systems designed specifically to stand up to the rigors of today's most advanced games. With prices starting at over \$3000, these systems are not for everyone. But if your family loves playing games, you'll want one of these PCs.

Like the best console game machines from companies like Nintendo and Sega, these PCs feature outstanding 3-D graphics; like the best fast-action Hollywood movies, they use advanced audio that surrounds you with sound. And like every PC, they provide the depth and interactivity that a console game or movie will never match.

We compared four cutting-edge PCs built and marketed as game systems — the Compaq Presario 8712, Falcon Northwest Mach V, Micron Millennia MXE, and NEC PowerPlayer 2020 — to see how well each plays the latest 3-D games. We also tested how they handled classic DOS games such as Wing Commander III, Falcon 3.0, and X-Wing. Adding in standard performance measures, we then determined which systems a game-playing family should buy.

PHOTOGRAPH: LIGHTWORKS PHOTOGRAPHIC

THE HOTTEST PCS

Sights and Sounds

High performance is the first order of business when it comes to running realistic games. All of these machines are designed around 200-MHz Pentium processors, except for the Micron Millennia MXE, which is one of the first machines to use an Intel processor with MMX technology. MMX is designed to handle multimedia more efficiently than other Pentiums. Each system is packed with 32MB of RAM and a secondary cache for increased memory performance, and all of them include a big hard drive and a fast CD-ROM drive.

In addition to a fast 2-D graphics system for running standard graphics (all these systems use either an S3 Virge or ATI Rage 2-D/3-D chip as the main graphics processor), each also features an additional subsystem dedicated to processing, accelerating, and rendering 3-D graphics in real time. Each machine has a high-speed 3-D processor (an NEC/Video-Logic PowerVR chip in Compaq's Presario

8712 and a 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics chip set in the other three) and 4MB of graphics RAM for manipulating 3-D scenes. The results are smoothly rendered, fast-moving, highly realistic games you have to experience to believe. Unless you've been in an arcade recently, you haven't seen anything like it.

High-quality stereo sound is crucial to enhancing the level of realism — and nice for mood-setting background music, too. All four systems include a sound card with wavetable synthesizer hooked up to a three-unit speaker set (two satellite speakers and a subwoofer). Compaq and NEC go further by adding 3-D playback effects to create the illusion of sound coming from all sides. Falcon's speakers go the extra mile and support Dolby Multimedia Surround Sound, a recording and playback method that makes for even better

sound placement, so the SU-27 Flanker on your tail really sounds like it's behind you.

In addition to great graphics and sound, a game PC requires a game controller, and

each system comes with at least a high-end joystick. The NEC PowerPlayer goes further in this regard, including a device that lets up to four people play a game at the same time.

Let's See Your Nintendo Do This

When a multimedia game PC is not being a multimedia game PC, it's pretty handy around the house, too. These are some of the most high-powered home systems ever created, and they handle financial, database, word-processing, and other productivity software without breaking a sweat. Each includes some productivity titles as well as games in its bundled software. These machines also come with high-speed communications for fast connections to the Internet.

After some exhaustive testing and some not-so-exhausting time spent playing games on each system, we decided that our favorite among the four is Micron's Millennia MXE. Its combination of best performance and lowest price is hard to overlook. It just edged out the Falcon Mach V, mostly because of pricing. The rest of the results, along with our subjective impressions, can give you a head start in choosing the right game system for your family. You'll find those on the following pages.

Steve Apiki is a FamilyPC contributing editor. E-mail him at apiki@apsol.com.

What the Scores Mean

100-95

A game player's dream machine.

94-85

Recommended for serious gamers; has the muscle to take on other chores, too.

84-75

Could be a good general-purpose machine, but not the best for games.

74-65

Some serious flaws. Not recommended.

64 & under

If you don't have anything nice to say...

Products that score 85 and above are FamilyPC Recommended. The system receiving the best score gets our Top Rated award, while systems earning a 10 in comparative value are designated Best Buys.

How We Made Our Picks

Each machine earns a score of from 1 to 10 in the following categories. We multiply the score in each category by the category weight, add all the scores together, and scale the result to 100 to calculate each system's overall score.

1 Performance (20% of overall score) Overall system performance is critical for smooth action with every kind of game. Our performance score is a composite of six quantitative ratings: Direct3D performance, as measured by Microsoft's Direct3D test; DOS graphics performance, as reported by Ziff-Davis Lab's PC Bench; 2-D Windows performance, CD-ROM drive speed, and video playback speed, tested with ZD Lab's Winbench; and performance running Windows applications, measured by ZD Lab's Winstone '96.

2 Sound (15%) Sound quality is subjective, so this score is based on expert opinion of the quality of the system audio, including the sound card and speakers.

3 Graphics (15%) The main factors in our graphics rating are the quality of and level of support for the 3-D graphics system, the quality of the 2-D graphics system, and the quality of the monitor.

4 Communications (5%) Head-to-head gaming demands high-speed communications, so modem speed and simultaneous voice and data capability make up 5 percent of our overall score.

5 Basic Components (15%) These are the core system components: the CPU, memory subsystem, hard drive, and CD-ROM drive. A 200-MHz Pentium processor is our benchmark CPU, and we also rate each computer on memory and hard disk capacity, CD-ROM drive speed, and quality of game controllers.

6 Software (5%) Scores here are based on the quality and variety of 3-D games, other games, and other software.

7 Legacy Compatibility (5%) In the past, most cutting-edge games were written for DOS, and people often encountered problems installing them on Windows systems. This category reflects the difficulty we faced in getting demanding DOS-based games to run.

8 Comparative Value (20%) We take the sum of a computer's scores in the other seven categories and divide it by that computer's estimated street price. The system with the highest score gets a 10 in this category and our Best Buy award.

Make Your PC a Game PC

You don't have to buy a new computer to experience most of the thrills of an ultimate game system. Instead, you can upgrade your current Windows computer in one or more of the following areas: CPU, RAM, 3-D graphics, wavetable sound, speakers, and game controller. The only prerequisite is that you have a Pentium system equipped with a PCI bus; if you have anything else, you're wasting your money. A complete makeover would cost you between \$800 and \$1000, but chances are you won't need to upgrade all six components in your system.

CPU Even with help from high-powered 3-D chips, a top-notch game system needs a speedy processor. If you have a 60- or 66-MHz Pentium, you can swap in a 120-/133-MHz Intel Pentium OverDrive processor for about \$275; it costs about the same for 75-MHz Pentium owners to upgrade to a 125-MHz OverDrive. A 150-MHz upgrade for 90-MHz Pentium systems costs about \$350, and a 166-MHz upgrade for a 100-MHz Pentium is about \$475. Gamers with Pentium systems below 90 MHz should seriously consider the upgrade; at 90 MHz and above, you should first spend money on other upgrade components.

RAM If you don't have 16MB of RAM in your system, you should upgrade your memory before anything else. An 8MB upgrade costs about \$75 and provides more of a performance boost than any other upgrade you perform. Don't hesitate, as RAM prices are currently at a historic low — and they don't promise to stay that way.

3-D Graphics A game machine needs a 3-D graphics accelerator. Upgrade cards come in two types: those that replace your current Windows graphics card and handle both 2-D and 3-D graphics, and those that work with your current 2-D card to accelerate 3-D graphics. Cards of the latter type require a free PCI slot and usually cost more, though they do provide faster 3-D graphics. Examples are the Diamond Monster 3D and Orchid Righteous 3D — both based on the Voodoo Graphics chip set — and the VideoLogic Apocalypse 3D, which uses the PowerVR 3-D chip. Products that provide both 2-D and 3-D acceleration and have the performance gamers need include the Creative Labs 3D Blaster PCI, Intergraph Reactor, and Sierra Screamin' 3D. Make sure any 3-D card you buy for gaming has at least 4MB of graphics memory. Prices start at about \$150.



Wavetable Sound If your 16-bit sound card doesn't support wavetable sound, often you can plug a wavetable subsystem into it. For example, you can upgrade a Creative Labs Sound Blaster 16 with either Creative's own WaveBlaster daughterboard or a Yamaha DB50XG for about \$75. If your sound card isn't upgradable, you can buy a new wavetable sound card that supports some form of 3-D sound starting at about \$150.



Speaker Systems For the best in computer audio, you need powered speakers (speakers that require an external power supply) and a subwoofer. Look for systems where the satellite speakers put out 10 watts or more and the subwoofer puts out at least 20W, and expect to pay \$100 and up. Other features to look for are easy-to-reach controls, especially for volume and mute. Make sure you don't need a separate mute control for the subwoofer. Look for speaker systems from companies such as Altec Lansing, Labtech, and MLI.

Game Controller Sophisticated games require sophisticated controllers. At a minimum, look for a joystick such as the CH Products Flightstick Pro, which comes with four buttons, a point-of-view (POV) hat, and a throttle. Expect to pay about \$50. For even more control, get a programmable joystick or game pad

such as the CH Products F-16 Fighterstick, Advanced Gravis Firebird 2, or Microsoft SideWinder Game Pad. If you specialize in a certain type of game, look for a specialized controller. The Logitech WingMan Warrior, for example, is great for Doom-style games, while many companies offer pedals and steering yokes for flight and driving simulations.



Micron Millennium MXE

The fastest system plus high-end 3-D graphics equals the top family game platform



Performance	10
Sound	8
Graphics	9
Communications	9
Basic Components	9
Software	8
Legacy Compatibility	8
Comparative Value	10
\$3394 direct (with monitor)	

THE \$3394 MILLENNIA MXE turned in the best performance of any game platform we reviewed, came packed with some of the latest gaming hardware (including a Pentium MMX processor), and was competitively priced. That combination of cutting-edge technology and high value makes the Millennium MXE both our Top Rated and Best Buy multimedia game system, and a sure family winner.

On the Millennium MXE, 3-D games such

as Whiplash and Monster Truck Madness that take advantage of the system's specialized graphics hardware — a 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics chip with 4MB of EDO DRAM — run fast enough and smooth enough to make you feel the drop in your stomach as your car takes a jump. Games not specifically designed for the 3Dfx chip run on the Millennium's standard graphics card, an S3 Virge-based Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 with 4MB of EDO video DRAM. The Stealth 3D 2000 is one of the fastest 2-D

graphics boards available, and it easily carries the Millennium through Windows 95 productivity software as well as Windows and DOS games. All this graphics power is bolted onto a 200-MHz Pentium MMX system equipped with 32MB of EDO RAM and a 512KB secondary cache that's a burner in its own right. Then there's the 12x CD-ROM drive, the fastest in this review. Altogether, our performance tests ranked the Millennium MXE the fastest Windows machine we've tested.

A 17-inch Micron monitor, integrated Sound Blaster chip, booming Advent speakers, and a Microsoft SideWinder joystick enhance the gaming experience. The Advent speaker set includes 10-watt satellites and a 30W subwoofer for excellent sound. The monitor is easy to tune, but it can't synch to the highest resolutions and refresh rates that the graphics card can provide.

We ran a slew of games on the Millennium MXE, ranging from Direct3D ti-



Low-Priced Rocket Sled The Micron Millennium MXE wins both Best Buy and Top Rated awards for its combination of superb game performance and excellent value.

The MMX Advantage

MMX is a technology found in new Pentium processors that lets them run multimedia software faster than a standard Pentium (see Family News, "MMX Arrives"). How much of a difference does MMX make? That's still to be decided, as software that can make the most of MMX enhancements isn't on the shelves yet. But because the MMX processor has a larger on-chip cache, just dropping an MMX processor into a standard Pentium PC gives the system a substantial boost.

We tested Micron's Millennium system both in its MXE configuration (with an MMX Pentium processor) and in the Millennium LXA form — the same system but with a standard Pentium CPU. As the table below shows, MMX gives a huge boost to application performance (Winstones) but doesn't much affect raw 3-D speed (although MMX-specific software will change that).

Millennia MXE	111.4	28.08
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tles like Deadly Tide, to DOS games like TIE Fighter and NASCAR Racing, to 3Dfx-specific games like Whiplash. The only problems came with DOS games — it took an extra setup step to access the Sound Blaster when running in DOS mode. Our other DOS problem was that switching between a DOS window and full-screen DOS would sometimes result in a blank screen. And finally, we never got TIE Fighter to work well with the SideWinder joystick.

Micron's software bundle includes all the basic productivity titles; Microsoft Works, Quicken, and Encarta 96 make a good start for a homework or work-at-home collection. But it's woefully short on games, including only Monster Truck Madness and UbiSoft's Pod.

The Millennium MXE's excellent basic performance makes it a great choice for games or any family task. And its performance will only get better as software vendors take advantage of the multimedia instructions built into its MMX Pentium CPU.

Micron Electronics, 800-828-0413 or 208-463-3434.

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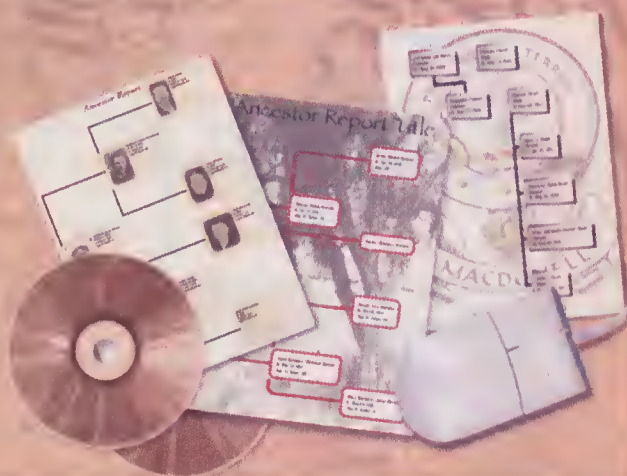
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Falcon Mach V

The serious gamer's grail, with a serious price



Performance	9
Sound	10
Graphics	10
Communications	9
Basic Components	9
Software	8
Legacy Compatibility	10
Comparative Value	7
\$4495 direct (with monitor)	

THE FALCON MACH V provides no-compromise audio and video performance that will knock you out of your seat. Unfortunately, the price might put you in a similar position: At a whopping \$4495, the otherwise-excellent Falcon Mach V may simply fall beyond most family budgets.

Decked out with a 200-MHz Pentium CPU, 32MB of EDO RAM, a 512KB secondary cache, a 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics processor with 4MB of EDO DRAM, and an S3 Virge

2-D/3-D graphics processor, the Falcon Mach V screams through 3-D enhanced games with astonishing realism and runs other titles without missing a beat.

Though slower than the Millennium, the Falcon Mach V makes a better game platform because it has better speakers and a better monitor. Its Altec Lansing ACS55 speakers (including 40-watt subwoofer) sound great for music and games; they can also play back Dolby Surround audio if games are recorded with that technology. We tried the Mach V with Wing Commander IV, which includes Dolby Surround encoding, and the effect is just stunning. The Princeton Graphics Ultra 17+ monitor is a fine, flat display with good contrast.



PHOTOGRAPH: LIGHTWORKS PHOTOGRAPHIC

Flying High Brilliant speakers and serious performance put the Falcon Mach V above the rest, but its price may also put it out of reach.

Falcon Northwest builds custom configurations, so swapping out a component or two for something a little less expensive is easy. According to the company, a similar system using EIDE instead of SCSI could reduce the price by as much as \$700.

Falcon Northwest Computer Systems, 888-325-2661 or 541-269-0775.

That's Entertainment

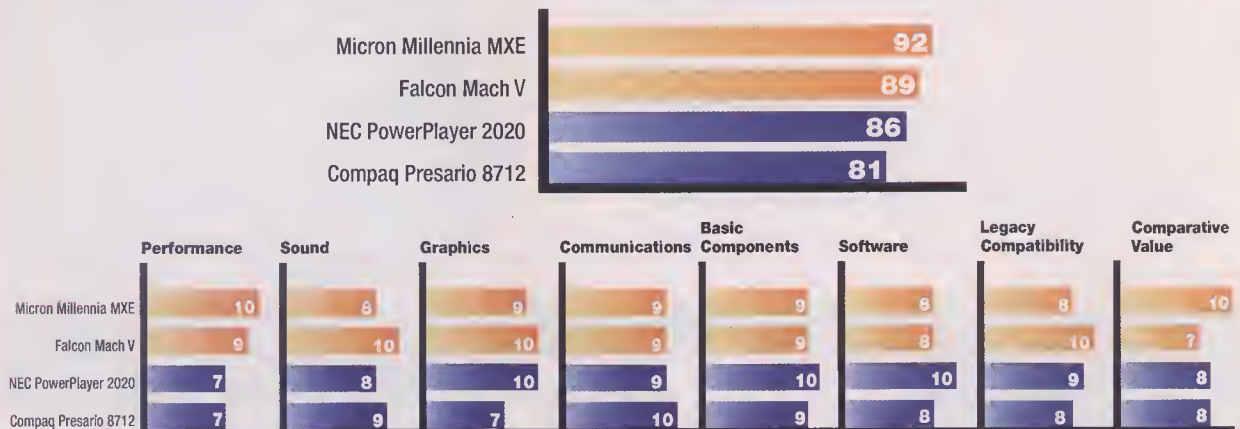
Our Top Rated system is the Micron Millennium MXE for its excellent performance and attractive price

You can almost take your pick: Three of the four systems in this review boast enough 3-D graphics hardware, Pentium performance, and outstanding audio to induce drooling in any serious gamer. Except for the Presario 8712, which we felt didn't have enough 3-D software support, all these machines earn a *FamilyPC* Recommended seal.

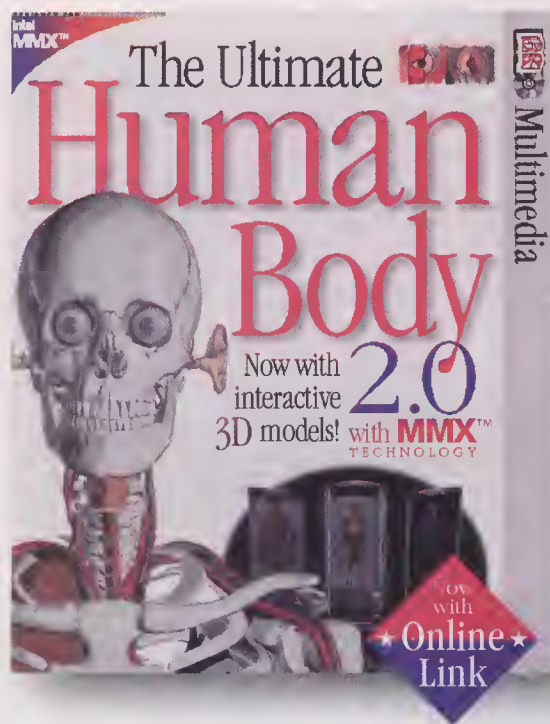
Top Rated and Best Buy seals both go to the Micron Millennium MXE, the fastest system we tested — and the least expensive. If you really want first-class multimedia and don't mind paying for it,

you'll want to go with the Falcon Mach V. NEC's PowerPlayer 2020 didn't quite reach the speeds of the Millennium or the Mach V, but its high-quality graphics, impressive controller package, and superb software make it the best one-stop pick for a family game machine.

The charts on this page show the scores (1 to 10) for each machine in each category, as well as the overall scores. Use the individual numbers to find the perfect machine for your family based on the categories that are most important to you.

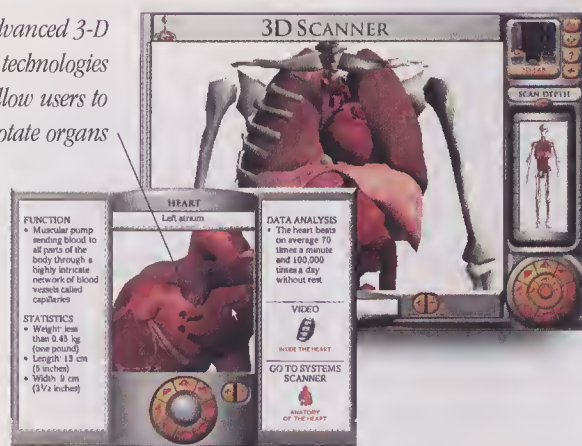


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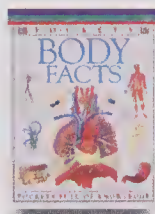
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NEC PowerPlayer 2020

PowerPlayer provides an arcade in a box



Performance7
Sound8
Graphics10
Communications9
Basic Components10
Software10
Legacy Compatibility9
Comparative Value8
\$4098 street (with monitor)

NEC's POWERPLAYER 2020 proves that a hot new multimedia PC gaming platform needn't be unfriendly. The PowerPlayer is easy to set up and comes with a complete collection of game and productivity titles.

The PowerPlayer 2020 includes a 6x CD-ROM drive with a four-disc changer. The multidisc drive generally works well, and it's great for speeding up multidisc games, but we had a few problems running programs that start DOS mode and try to ac-

cess an inactive CD-ROM.

The PowerPlayer has the same 3-D graphics subsystem as the top two systems: a 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics chip with 4MB of EDO RAM. The 3-D game play on games like Whiplash and Toshinden is similarly amazing and really has to be experienced. A fast ATI 3D Rage processor with 2MB of EDO DRAM drives 2-D (and some 3-D) graphics. A 200-MHz Pentium with 32MB of EDO RAM and 256KB cache drives the rest of the system.

NEC also includes a nice collection of game controllers — including a ThrustMaster FCS joystick, two game pads, and a Gravis Grip MultiPort that lets you hook up multiple controllers at the same time, making this

a system your family can use together.

The software bundle includes all the productivity essentials and the best collection of games, including Command and Conquer and a 3Dfx version of Descent II. If you're looking for a simple, powerful, family-friendly, one-stop game machine, check out the PowerPlayer 2020.

NEC Computer Systems Division, 800-632-4636 or 508-264-8000.

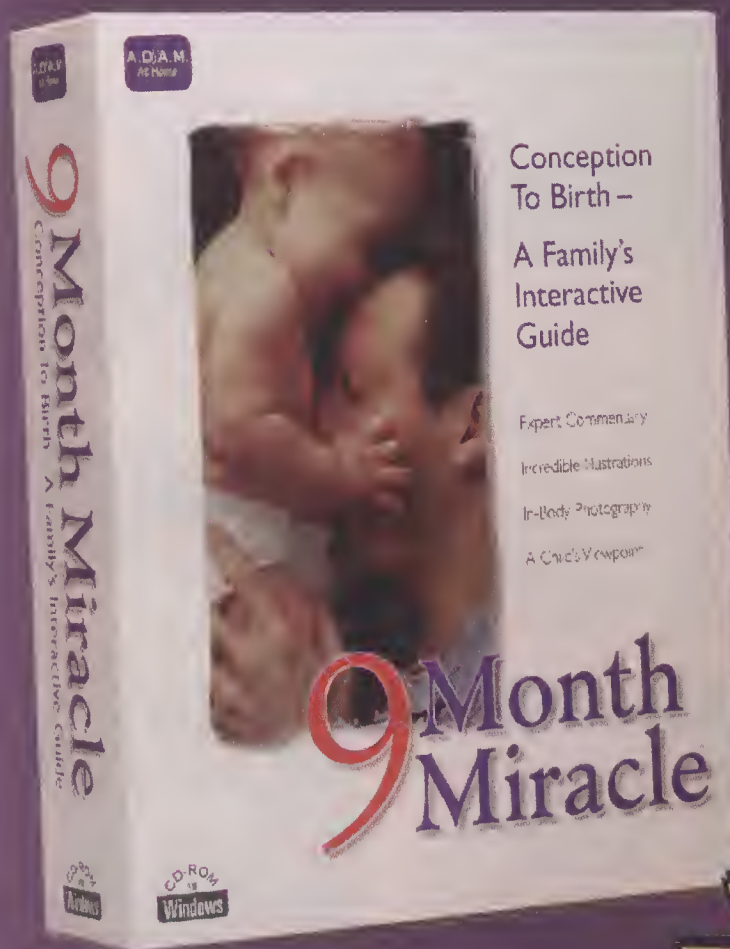


Power Gamer NEC's gaming entry has top-of-the-line graphics, a nifty CD changer, and a great software collection.

Game Systems: The Inside Story

System	External cache	RAM	Hard drive	Monitor / size (inches)	Standard graphics / EDO RAM	3-D graphics / RAM	3-D sound	Speakers	CD-ROM drive	Game controllers
Micron Millennia MXE	512KB	32MB EDO	2.1GB	Micron 17FGx / 17	S3 Virge / 4MB	3Dfx Voodoo Graphics / 4MB	None	Advent AV370	12x EIDE	Microsoft SideWinder 3D Pro
Falcon Mach V	512KB	32MB EDO	2.1GB	Princeton Graphics Ultra 17+ / 17	S3 Virge / 4MB	3Dfx Voodoo Graphics / 4MB	Yes	Altec Lansing ACS55	8x SCSI	CH Products F-16 Combatstick; CH Products Gamepad; CH Products High Speed Gameport
NEC PowerPlayer 2020	256KB	32MB EDO	3.2GB	NEC XV17+ / 17	ATI 3D Rage / 2MB	3Dfx Voodoo Graphics / 4MB	Yes	Advent AV370	4-disc 6x IDE	ThrustMaster FCS, Gravis Grip MultiPort, two Grip game pads
Compaq Presario 8712	512KB	32MB EDO	3.8GB	Compaq Presario 1725 / 17	S3 Virge / 2MB	NEC/Video Logic PowerVR / 4MB	Yes	JBL	8x EIDE	ThrustMaster Advanced Gamepad

When it comes to providing
new parents with answers,
we deliver.

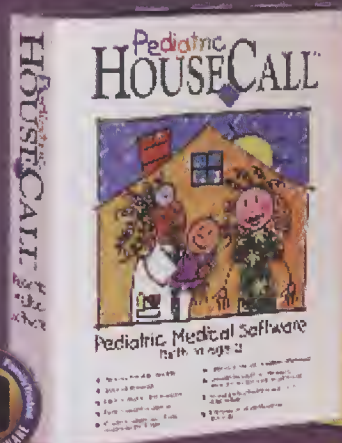


Nine Month Miracle from A.D.A.M. Software, Inc. is a wonderful way for the entire family to learn about conception, childbirth and everything in between. There's even a special section geared toward younger viewers that helps address tough questions about pregnancy through games and animations. In addition to this program's award-winning illustrations, see the stunning in-body imagery of world-renowned photographer Lennart Nilsson come to life through the power of multimedia.

And now for a limited time you'll also get a **FREE** copy of Pediatric HouseCall, the most complete, interactive medical software for parents today. Designed to grow along with your children from birth to adolescence, it offers an easy-to-use reference for illness along with an interactive growth chart, immunization reminder, and much more.

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we'll send you a copy of
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For more information,
check out our web site at
www.adam.com



FamilyPC Magazine, Dec '96

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Available on CD-ROM for Macintosh or Windows.
*Please mention offer 570. **S&H not included.
Good through March 31, 1997 or while supplies last.

Compaq Presario 8712

The hardware is willing, but the software is weak



Performance	7
Sound	9
Graphics	7
Communications	10
Basic Components	9
Software	8
Legacy Compatibility	8
Comparative Value	8
\$3448 street (with monitor)	

COMPAQ'S PRESARIO 8712 has both the excellent family features of all recent Presarios and the computing and graphics muscle to tear through realistic 3-D action games. But game titles designed for the Presario 8712's graphics hardware really aren't here yet, and until those packages show up in force, we won't know how the machine's potential translates into real game power.

The Presario 8712's 3-D processor is an NEC/VideoLogic PowerVR chip. As we went to press, we couldn't find any game titles that natively supported PowerVR (17 compa-

nies had announced that they were working on games for the chip). Compaq had yet to deliver driver software for Microsoft Direct3D, which will allow games written for Direct3D (e.g., Hellbender and Monster Truck Madness) to take advantage of PowerVR acceleration.

The rest of the system is a little more familiar: 2-D graphics processing using an S3 Virge with 2MB of EDO video RAM (plus 4MB of dedicated 3-D texture memory), a 200-MHz Pentium processor, 32MB of RAM, and a 512KB cache.

Compaq includes JBL Pro speakers with the Presario 8712, including a 20-watt subwoofer. The audio quality delivered by these speakers connected to the 8712's InterWave-based sound system is fantastic. The game controller is a ThrustMaster

Advanced Gamepad, a funky but comfortable game pad with two handles and two triggers.

With top-notch family features, good performance, and an attractive price (\$3448), the Presario 8712 is the best general-purpose machine in the bunch. But until there's more support for its primary 3-D graphics processor, we won't really know how it stacks up against other 3-D game systems.

Compaq Computer, 800-345-1518.



PHOTOGRAPH: LIGHTWORKS PHOTOGRAPHIC

All Dressed Up The Presario 8712 has the specs but needs some software.

The Performance Breakdown

With its MMX processor, the Micron Millennia MXE tops our performance ratings, followed by the Falcon Mach V, the NEC PowerPlayer 2020, and the Compaq Presario 8712. The difference between the Falcon Mach V and the NEC PowerPlayer 2020 is probably a result of the latter's smaller cache.

The Compaq Presario 8712, with its PowerVR 3-D graphics, shows two performance anomalies. First, the Presario's monitoring of its front-panel controls slows it down on the Winstone performance tests. Second — and more important — is its terrible perfor-

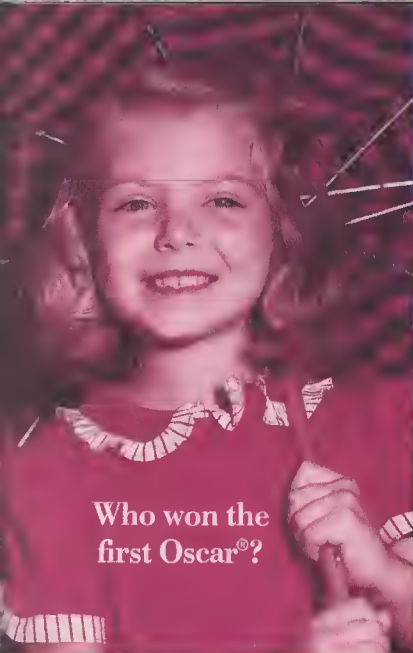
mance on the Windows 3-D and DOS graphics tests. This dismal showing is due to the fact that Compaq didn't have a PowerVR Direct3D driver ready in time for our testing. By default, therefore, the 3-D tests ran on the Presario's Virge chip. Clearly, the mid-range Virge is just no match for the high-end 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics chip set at the heart of the other three systems. Only when Compaq delivers a Direct3D driver for the PowerVR chip set will you see the Presario 8712 perform comparably to the other high-end game systems.

Systems	Applications (Winstone)	Windows 3-D Graphics (Direct3D Fill Rate, Mpps ¹)	DOS Graphics (PC Bench)
Micron Millennia MXE	101.4	28.08	5885.33
Falcon Mach V	91.8	28.00	5796.50
NEC PowerPlayer 2020	81.0	24.04	4306.56
Compaq Presario 8712	74.0	2.82 ²	3789.86
Micron Home MPC P200 (fastest system previously tested)	88.0	5.89	N/A

¹Mpps=thousands of polygons per second

²Using Virge chip.

For all tests, higher numbers are better.



Who won the first Oscar®?



How many eggs does a spider lay?



What are the laws of motion?



Who invented zero?

For 80 years,
one encyclopedia
has been built
upon the questions
kids ask most.



Are footballs made from pigskin?



Why is Mars red?



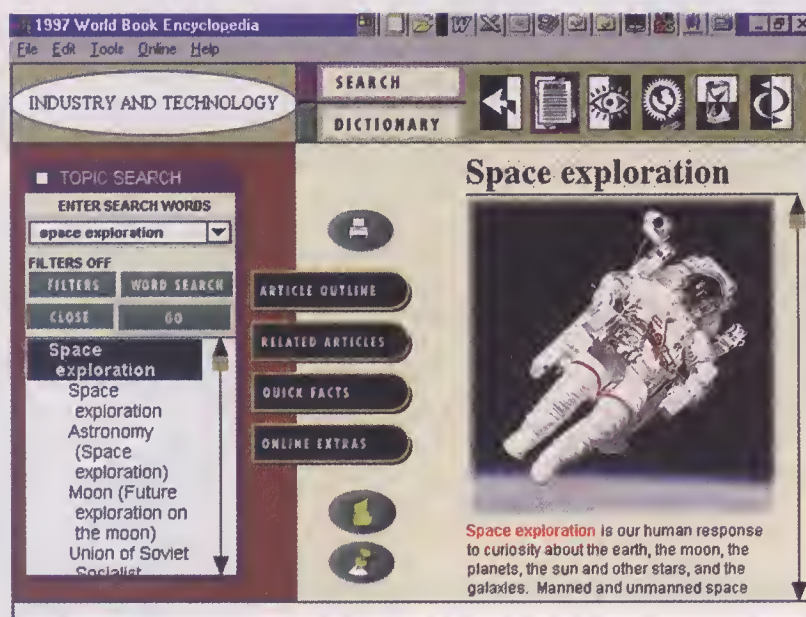
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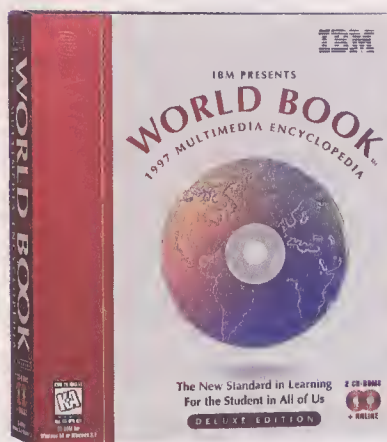


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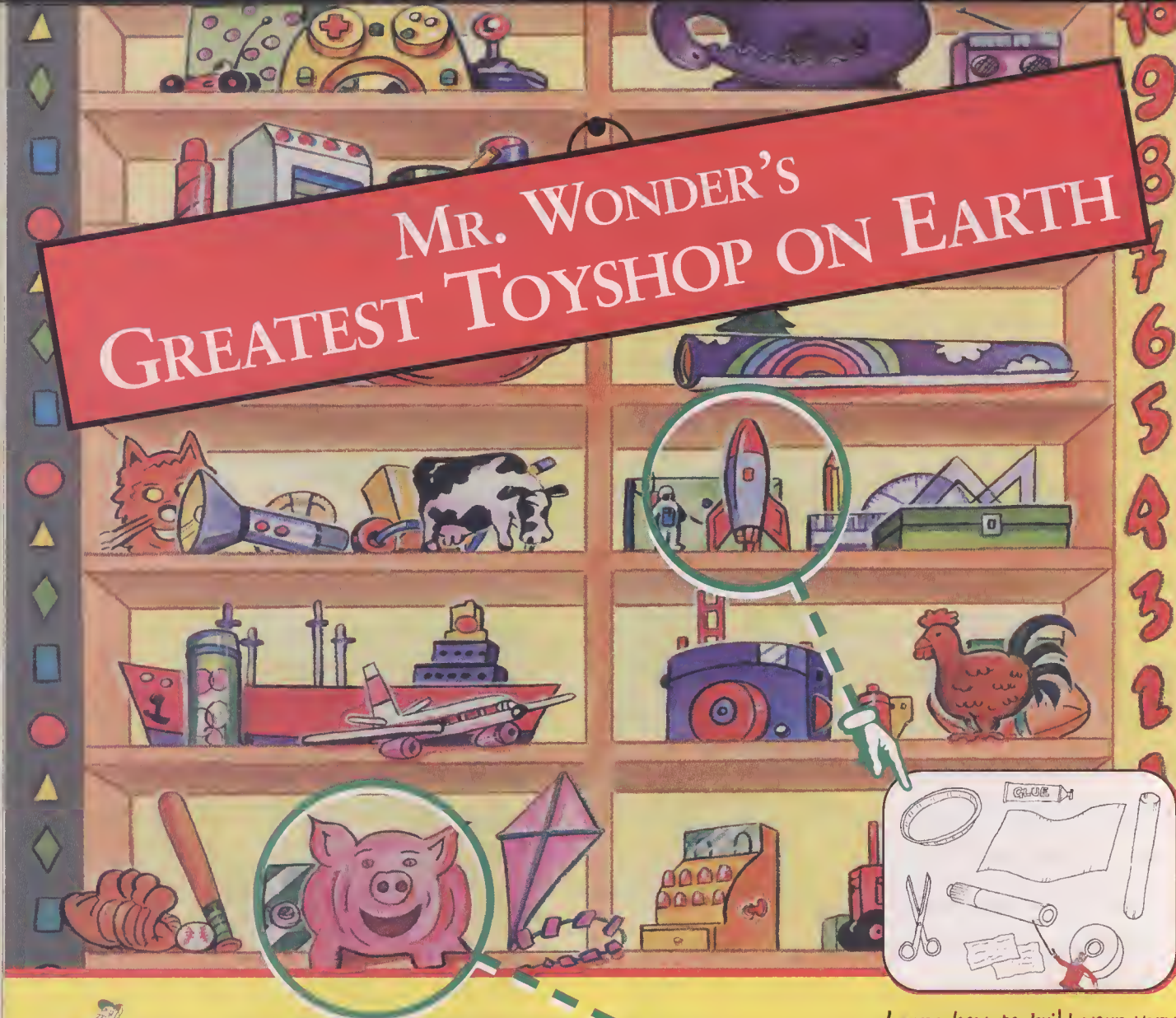
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Image Capture for Your PC

*You have four good options
for getting images into your
computer. How do you decide
which is best for your family?*

BY JON PEPPER

DIGITAL IMAGING — capturing and manipulating images on a computer — is the ultimate merger of two major family fascinations: photographs and computers. American families took more than 17 billion photographs last year, according to the Photo Marketing Association, and it's estimated that 150 billion more are sitting around homes across the country in what might euphemistically be called traditional storage: mainly overflowing shoe boxes in the attic. Those photos no longer have to stay in the attic, however, because now there's a variety of ways to get photos and video images into your PC and do something fun with them — without spending lots of money or time learning new hardware and software.

Once the images are in your PC, the fun begins. With the right software, you can enhance an image, bend it, shape

it, or twist it to your liking, and put it in a document or family project. From there, you can print it in glorious color or send it to relatives and friends via the Internet.

First, however, you have to get the images into the computer, a process known as *image capture*. You have four main ways to accomplish this: via digital cameras, scanners, video-capture devices, and film-to-disk conversion. We looked at a typical family project — capturing and printing an image for the grandparents — to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the various options. Then we rated the four technologies in four areas: immediacy, image quality, cost, and ease of use. Here's how the four main choices fared.

Digital Cameras

Digital cameras are hot right now. New models from companies such as Canon and Olympus are coming out at a dizzying pace, and each new product seems to be cheaper than the last. The digital camera's appeal is obvious: It's easy to carry and fun to use. One of its disadvantages is that the electronic file becomes the only record of the event you're shooting.

In some ways, digital cameras operate much like their film-based cousins — you just point and shoot. Most even include a built-in flash. The big difference is that digital cameras use memory instead of film to store images: The camera converts an image into digital form, much as a scanner does, and stores it in memory. The number of images a camera holds depends on how much memory it has and the quality of the images. For example, the Epson PhotoPC (Top Rated and Best Buy; see July/August 1996 FamilyTested Hardware) has 1MB of memory and can store either 16 high-resolution (640-by 480-pixel) images or 32 standard-resolution (320-by 240-pixel) photos. Some digital cameras, including the Epson, can take extra memory modules that increase the number of images they can hold before you need to download the images to your PC's hard drive.

Downloading the images is simple. The camera comes with a cable to connect it to your computer's serial port (COM ports on Win-



dows systems, modem or printer ports on the Mac). The camera also includes software that lets you save the images in a variety of graphics formats (BMP, JPEG, TIFF). Once you've transferred the images to the computer, you can use the pictures in any number of paint, desktop publishing, and word-processing programs.

We used a Kodak DC20 camera for our project, though many other digital cameras work as well. We had no difficulty learning to use the DC20

How's It Look? This family photo was taken with the Kodak DC20. Top: The image displayed on-screen. Bottom: The image printed on the Epson 500.



Digital cameras are easy to carry and fun to use, and prices are dropping.

or taking our sample shot, and transferring the image from the camera to the PC was easy.

How do digital cameras rate?

Immediacy ★★★★★

You can't get much more immediate than this. Take the photo; plug it into your PC: instant gratification. Many cameras (such as models from Casio, Kodak, Sony, and Olympus) even have LCD screens so that you can see images right away — even before you transfer them to your PC.

Image Quality ★★

This is one of the weaknesses of digital cameras. The quality is generally fine for images that you'll put on the Web and or incorporate into family documents and projects. However, it's a far cry from the quality of photos taken with conventional cameras and captured with a scanner. Compared to regular cameras, digital cameras have an awful lot of catching up to do in terms of image quality.

Cost ★★

Digital cameras for families vary from about \$300 to \$900; most are around \$500. The cost of consumables is low, however; all you'll need to replace is the batteries.

Ease of Use/Convenience ★★★★★

If you can use a regular camera, you can use a digital camera.

Scanners

Scanners work along the same principle as a copy machine. You place the material into the scanner, and the photoreceptors and the lens capture the image and store it on your hard drive. Scanners include software that lets you control the quality of the scanned image (color, gray scale, amount of light) and also saves it in graphical file formats (just like digital cameras). Once you've scanned the image, you can manipulate, edit, or crop it, import it into a variety of ap-

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Aver TVGenie is perfect for converting a bedroom computer into a remote TV that has an alarm function built in. The sleep function allows you to program the Aver TVGenie to turn off automatically after 30, 60, 90, or 120 minutes. You can fall asleep to your favorite programs and not bother turning the TVGenie off, it does it for you.



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Photo scanners are smaller but less flexible than other handhelds.

plications, or send it over the Internet.

Scanners come in three basic types: flatbed, handheld, and photo-only. All three have advantages and disadvantages.

Flatbed scanners produce higher resolutions and therefore superior image quality. They also offer greater flexibility in terms of the size of the image you can scan. But they're more expensive than the other types, and they take up a lot of desk space.

Handheld scanners are much smaller and fall into a lower price range, but they limit you to scanning small photos or articles that are 4 to 5 inches wide. If you want to scan a larger image, you must rely on software that "stitches" several scan passes together into a single file. Also, since you roll the scanner over the item manually, you need a steady hand; wavering and registration problems are common.

Photo scanners save space and are slightly more expensive than handhelds. As their name implies, however, they're meant for scanning photos as opposed to text documents or larger-size graphics, so they don't offer the flexibility of a handheld or flatbed scanner.

Scanners used to be complicated and expensive. No more. Now they're designed specifically for family use, and they come with fun and useful software. Some are even built into the computer itself, as is the case with the HP Pavilion PhotoDrive (the drive is also available for any PC from Storm Technology, for \$199).

Scanners offer something digital cameras don't: the capability to turn



Compare It Yourself The top image was scanned. We printed the bottom image on the Epson 500.

Photo-Only Printers or Color Ink-Jets?

No matter how you get photos into your PC, at some point you are going to want to get all those nifty projects and digitally enhanced photographs out of your computer. For most families, that means printing to a color ink-jet printer, with results ranging from so-so to very good, depending on how new your printer is and what quality paper you choose.

Color ink-jet printers can do a good job, but if you want the printout to resemble the original photo as closely as possible, then consider another option: specialty photo printers. These printers use a different technology than ink-jet printers do, and the result is prints that come close to the level of film prints developed at a photo processor. They aren't perfect — they tend to print only

snapshot-size prints (3 by 5 or 4 by 6 inches), they're fairly slow, and prints cost about \$1 each. However, the prints do look good.

The first printer of this breed was the FotoFun Digital Color Photo Printer (\$599; Fargo Electronics, 800-327-4622), and it is still a strong choice. In about 2 minutes, the printer produces a sharp-looking 4- by 6-inch image. You can even get a special kit that allows you to transfer photos to coffee mugs.

Other, newer options include the Fujifilm Personal Photographic Print Maker (\$699; Fuji Photo Film, 800-378-3854) and the CP-D1 Digital Color Printer (\$495; Mitsubishi Electronics, 800-843-2515 or 714-220-2500). The Fuji printer turns out a 3- by 5-inch print in about 3 or 4 minutes, using high-quality

24-bit color. The less expensive Mitsubishi produces 3- by 5-inch prints in roughly the same time frame, but with slightly inferior results. For both products, prints cost about 20 to 25 cents less than with the Fargo.

As a group, all three of these printers turn out prints of a quality that falls somewhere between what you get from a good color ink-jet printer (like the Epson Stylus Color 500, Hewlett-Packard DeskJet 693C, or Canon BJC-4200) and what you get with a true photograph. Per-page costs are about half what they are for ink-jets, since high-quality ink-jet paper is about \$1 a sheet and you have to factor in the cost of the ink.

Despite all this, we still can't recommend photo-only printers to most families. You're better off getting a new color ink-jet printer, which produces very good photo prints but also can print anything else your family needs. And at \$279 to about \$350, they are less costly, too.



High-Priced Quality The image produced with the photo printer (left) looks better than the one produced with the color ink-jet printer (right).

TO DO

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WORK OUT
PICK UP CHAIR
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SALMON FOR BBQ
LUMBERYARD - DECK SUPPLIES
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your existing photographs into digital images. For our project, we needed to photograph our young horseman with a regular camera and then scan the developed film into the PC using the Storm EasyPhoto Reader. Once we had the prints back from the lab, the process was quick and just about foolproof. Here's another advantage that a scanner has over a digital camera: If the scanner is good quality, you could end up with a higher-quality image on-screen. And of course, you'll have the printed photograph, too.

How do scanners rate?

Immediacy ★★

Unless you're scanning existing photos, scanners just can't compare to digital cameras. You have to shoot the photo, get the film developed, and then scan in the image. It's not for the impatient.

Quality ★★★★★

Even the most inexpensive scanners produce 200-dot-per-inch images — far better than other image-capture devices, which measure their resolution in on-screen pixels. The quality of the scan depends on the quality of the original.

Cost ★★★

Scanners are cheaper than digital cameras and any of the other options except film-to-disk conversions.

Ease of Use/Convenience ★★★

Photo-oriented scanners are easy to use. Products like the EasyPhoto Reader and Kodak Snapshot Photo Scanner 1 don't require any in-



The Snappy captures one frame of video at a time.

stallation beyond plugging in a cable. Some scanners do require that you put a board inside your PC, but otherwise they are at least as simple to use as digital cameras.

Video-Capture Boards and Devices

What if the image you want is on a videotape? Don't worry, you do have some options for getting a still video frame into your PC. A video-capture board is the traditional way of taking a still video frame or moving stream of video from a VCR or video camera, but even the low-end boards start around \$500 — a costly investment for a family.

A more affordable way to capture video is the Snappy Video Snapshot (\$199.95; Play, 800-306-7529 or 916-851-0800). The Snappy translates a video signal into a format your computer can read. The palm-size rectangular box comes with a cable that plugs directly into a PC's parallel port. Another cable connects the Snappy to the video source. The Snappy captures a single frame at a time. Once you've grabbed the video frame, you can save it in PCX, BMP, JPEG, or TIFF file format and then manipulate it any way you like.

For our sample project, we videotaped our horse and rider and then used the Snappy to capture the still shots we wanted. The more expensive video-capture boards offer the flexibility of grabbing moving video clips as well as single frames; but for single-frame grabs only, it's hard to find a process that's easier and more affordable than using the Snappy.

It's a Snap We captured this Snappy video image (top) and printed it on the Epson 500 (bottom).



THREE TOTAL DIGITAL DARKROOMS for Different Budgets

There are plenty of ways to put together a digital darkroom at home to open up a world of creative projects and potential for your family. The following scenarios are examples that show what is possible at different price points.

Darkroom 1: Cost-Conscious

Camera: Casio QV-10A Plus (\$479)

Scanner: None

Printer: Canon BJC-4200 (\$279)

Software: Adobe PhotoDeluxe and Canon Creative 2 CD-ROM (no cost; they come with printer and camera)

Total cost: \$758

Overall functionality: Good

Darkroom 2: High-Quality

Camera: Epson PhotoPC (\$499)

Scanner: Storm EasyPhoto Reader (\$199)

Printer: Hewlett-Packard DeskJet 693C (\$349) with photo kit (\$49) — \$398 total

Software: EasyPhoto software (comes with camera and scanner)

Total cost: \$1096

Overall functionality: Very good

Darkroom 3: Semiprofessional

Camera: Canon PowerShot 600 (\$949)

Scanner: Umax Vista-S6E (\$399)

Printer: Epson Stylus Color 500 (\$279) and Fargo FotoFun (\$599)

Software: Adobe PhotoDeluxe, ImageFolio, Epson printer software (no cost; all included with the hardware); Microsoft Picture It (\$79.95)

Total cost: \$2305.95

Overall functionality: Superb

How does video capture rate?

Immediacy ★★★

Because no film processing is involved, video capture is fast. Once you have the videotape in hand, this method matches anything else for quickness.

Quality ★★★

Very good. The quality of the original videotape is important, but the Snappy provides plenty of color definition and detail.

Cost ★★★

The Snappy is less expensive than any digital camera and most of the scanners; it sells for \$199.

Ease of Use/Convenience ★★

Using the Snappy is literally a one-click (or one-snap) process. If

Top Quality This film-to-disk image (top) prints nicely on a color ink-jet printer (bottom).

your video camera has a video-out port, you can plug it right into the Snappy. Otherwise, you need to put the tape into your VCR and locate the VCR next to the PC, and this can be a bit cumbersome.

Film-to-Disk Services

What if you have no scanner, digital camera, or other peripheral for capturing images? If you're not ready to invest in one of these devices, you still have some options. You can take advantage of professional film-to-disk conversion. Several companies provide film-to-disk conversions onto either CD or floppy disk at local photo processors or via mail order. For example, most local Ritz photo-processing stores offer film-to-CD conversion for \$19.97 for a 24-exposure roll or \$25.61 for 36 exposures. For that price you'll receive a disc containing your professionally scanned photos, the developed negatives, and thumbnail prints (but no standard-size prints). Kodak offers a new service that puts your photos onto CD in its new FlashPix format at very high resolution (1024 by 1536 pixels); it charges \$19.95 for 24 exposures. CVS stores and other major chains offering Konica Picture Show will provide a floppy disk, negatives, and 3-inch prints for \$11 for 24 exposures or \$15 for 36 exposures. You'll find other similar services on the Internet.



The Best for Your Family?

Okay, so now you know the options, but which one is geared toward your family? Think about how often you'll use photos with documents and what equipment you have now. If your family is excited about the possibilities, then a digital camera or scanner is a good investment — you won't pay for film, so you can do lots of experimenting. If you are more concerned with quality or only plan to use photos in documents once in a while, then film-to-disk conversion or a scanner is a better bet for you. If you're hooked on video, then think about the Snappy Video Snapshot.

Whatever choice you make, don't forget about software. Though you can put a photo into just about any document (such as ones created with Word or WordPerfect), you need specialized software to retouch and enhance photos. Most digital cameras and scanners already come with some software for this purpose. Our two favorites are Adobe PhotoDeluxe and Microsoft's Picture It; both are inexpensive and combine can't-miss photo-editing ease and project templates.

Whenever and however you decide to turn your family PC into a digital darkroom, we're confident that any of the methods and products here will do a fine job of getting your family into the picture.

Decisions, Decisions

No one method for getting images into your PC is perfect; each has some trade-offs. What you need to do is find out which areas are most important so you can select the most appropriate method for your family's needs and budget.

If you care most about...	Then consider...
Immediacy and Ease of Use/Convenience	Digital cameras
Quality and Cost	Scanners
Quality and Ease of Use/Convenience	Film-to-disk conversion
Immediacy and Ease of Use/Convenience	Video capture

How do film-to-disk services rate?

Immediacy ★

This is clearly the most time-consuming option. At best, you can have photos scanned locally; at worst, you'll need to mail your film to a remote processor and wait for their return.

Quality ★★★

Your family's reward for waiting is high-quality images. You get professionally scanned images at resolutions far above what digital cameras or video-capture devices produce.

Cost ★★★

The price for film-to-disk conversion varies widely. Kodak will scan 24 images in a moderate-resolution JPEG format for \$5 a floppy disk. You end up paying more per photo than you would with digital-capture methods (which give you unlimited photos on the digital "film"), but you don't have to spend big money for the digital camera or scanner in the first place.

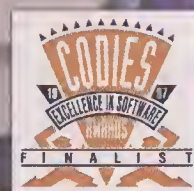
Ease of Use/Convenience ★★★

It's hard to beat this kind of convenience and ease of use. Although you have to wait to get your photos, you don't need to do anything else. The photos come to you on disk (or CD), so you just pop them into your PC.

Jon Pepper is a FamilyPC contributing editor. E-mail him at JonPepper@aol.com.

Look Mom! Two Hands!

NEW!



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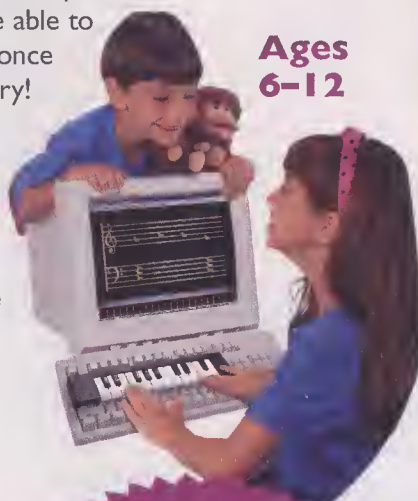
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Macintosh Performa 6360

Solid performance at a competitive price

FamilyPC Score Recommended **89**

REFLECTING APPLE'S RECENT effort to make its home-computer pricing more competitive, the Macintosh Performa 6360 offers reliable

start your Mac, you're introduced to the Performa Interactive Tour, an animated tutorial that explains how your system works, from moving the mouse to making a video.

While the 160-MHz Power PC 603e processor doesn't match the speed of the 200-MHz 603e found in the Performa 6400/200 (see October 1996 Hardware Reviews), it's a capable workhorse that can handle your word-processing, finance, and multimedia titles with ease. The

rest of the Performa's hardware load meets the *FamilyPC* minimum requirements: 16MB of RAM, a 1.2GB hard drive, an 8x CD-ROM drive, a 28.8-kbps internal data/voice/fax modem, 16-bit stereo with Surround Sound, 1MB of video RAM, and one PCI expansion slot.

Apple's Multiple Scan 15AV, a 15-inch (13-inch viewable) multimedia monitor, provides a bright, clear display. The integrated speakers are built into the sides of the monitor, which makes the screen look smaller than it actually is. After connecting the monitor's speakers to the computer with the included sound cable, we were treated to excellent full-stereo Surround Sound.

An excellent software package rounds out this affordable system. More than 24 titles cover a wide range of education, productivity, and Internet software. The bundle includes voice-mail, fax, and America Online software, Quicken SE, ClarisWorks, Netscape, Web Workshop (to build your own Web sites), The Amazing Writing Machine, Descent, and more.

The Performa 6360 is a solid performer that won't let you down or ruin your budget. Whether you're looking to upgrade from an

older machine or ready to buy your first Mac, you won't go wrong with the Performa 6360.

—Lauren Simonds

Macintosh Performa 6360, 160-MHz PowerPC 603e, 16MB RAM, 1.2GB hard drive, 15-inch monitor, 28.8-kbps fax modem, 8x CD-ROM drive; Apple Computer, 800-538-9696 or 408-996-1010; **\$1998 (\$1499 without monitor).**

Macintosh PowerBook 1400cs/117

Great performance — poor price

FamilyPC Score **82**

Apple's new desktop pricing strategy (see Performa review) apparently doesn't apply to its notebooks. The \$2900 PowerBook 1400cs still costs about \$400 more than a Windows notebook with similar or better features. Premium price aside, the PowerBook 1400cs/117 offers excellent performance that lets you run productivity, education, and multimedia titles without a hitch.

The 1400cs/117 sports a 117-MHz PowerPC 603e processor, 16MB of RAM, a 750MB hard drive, a 6x modular CD-ROM drive (which you can swap out to load the floppy drive), and a big — 11.3-inch — dual-scan color display running at 800 by 600 pixels. Although it's difficult to compare the 603e processor directly to a Pentium processor, the 117-MHz 603e's performance is roughly in line with a 100- or 120-MHz Pentium.

The 11.3-inch dual-scan display is big, bright, and easy to read. We found the keyboard comfortable, although we noticed that the on/off switch is a bit close to the backspace button; luckily the switch needs to be held down for a second of two to activate shutdown. You can eas-

Virtuous Display The 1400cs features a huge screen for better viewing.



It's a Deal The Performa 6360's price is easy on the wallet.

performance and familiar Mac features at a price that fits most family budgets. Comparable to a 166-MHz Pentium system and priced at \$2018, the Performa 6360 packs excellent value and a great computing experience into one simple package.

As with any Mac, setup consists of connecting a few clearly labeled cables. An illustrated setup poster guides the process. Attaching the monitor base was the most complicated task, and that took only a minute or two. Once you

REVIEWS

ily add memory or upgrade the notebook's hard drive by popping open the keyboard. We were disappointed with the single-speaker built-in sound — most notebooks have two speakers. We also prefer longer-lasting lithium-ion batteries instead of the nickel-metal-hydrate battery used in this notebook.

One fun difference about the 1400cs is the addition of a clear, hard-plastic casing on one side of the notebook. Apple includes a selection of art sheets that you can slide under the casing to personalize your notebook, much like putting a book cover on a textbook. Of course, you can also create your own art or slip photos underneath.

If cost is your primary consideration when it comes to choosing a notebook, then you're better off looking at less expensive Windows 95 laptops. But if you're a devoted Mac user, you won't be disappointed by the PowerBook 1400cs — as long as you're willing to pay the premium.

—Eric Griffith

PowerBook 1400cs/117, Apple Computer, 800-538-9696; \$2900.

Canon BJC-240

A great entry-level printer from Canon

FamilyPC Score Recommended **85**

As the entry-level product in Canon's line, the \$179 BJC-240 can't match the print quality of its more expensive siblings, but your family will be hard-pressed to find more features and value for under \$200. The 5.5-pound printer produces good-looking documents, with 720- by 360-dot-per-inch resolution for black and 360 by 360 dpi in color. Printing speeds range from 4 pages per minute for black to 3 minutes per page for color.



Pretty Picture The BJC-240 can take an optional photo-quality ink cartridge.

The 240 falls short of the sharpness that more expensive products produce, so you probably don't want to use it for a demanding business proposal, but for schoolwork and creative projects it's more than sufficient.

In addition to the two standard ink cartridges (tricolor, \$37, 300 pages; black, \$30, 500 pages), you can also use either a neon ink (\$37, 300 pages) or photo cartridge (\$37, 90 pages) in the BJC-240. The photo ink cartridge improves the appearance of photographic prints, but at about 50 cents a page (plus the cost of special photo paper) it isn't cheap. Still, this feature sets the BJC-240 apart from other entry-level color ink-jets. Another plus is the excellent Canon Creative software that comes bundled with the printer. The two-CD-ROM set includes everything from American Greetings' greeting card software to quotes from *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, adding to the overall family value of the printer.

Factor in the one-year warranty with toll-free support and next-day replacement, and the BJC-240 is currently the best deal that budget-minded families will find in the fast-moving color ink-jet printer market.

—Jon Pepper

BJC-240, Canon Computer Systems, 800-848-4200; \$179.

NEC SuperScript 100C

NEC's first budget color printer

FamilyPC Score **80**

The SuperScript 100C is NEC's first color ink-jet printer, and at \$169, it is one of the most affordable we've tested. Designed to compete with other entry-level printers such as the Canon BJC-240, the 100C is a mixed bag. With resolutions of 600 by 300 dots per inch and 300 by 300 dpi respectively, the color and black prints were acceptable, though they lack the sharpness produced by competing products. Overall, the 100C is a bit lower in quality than some other inexpensive printers that also use two ink cartridges (one for black, one for color). The 100C prints 3 pages per minute in black and 3 minutes per page in color. Black cartridges print 390 pages and sell for \$25.95, while color cartridges cost \$34.95 and print 160 pages.

On the plus side, the printer's small size, light weight, and



Lightweight Division The 100C is compact and easy to carry.

good documentation make it exceptionally easy to set up and use. Also, NEC includes a fine software driver for the 5-pound printer that helps you coax the most from its relatively modest capabilities. For example, you can change the color balance (more blue, less red, and so on), preview changes on-screen, and adjust the brightness and contrast of the image to be printed. Another plus is the one-year warranty, which includes toll-free technical support and next-day replacement of defective printers.

However, NEC includes only the color cartridge standard with the 100C and does not offer any project-oriented software, as Epson, Hewlett-Packard, and Canon do. Given the average print quality, the compact size and price of the 100C are not enough to make us recommend it over the Canon BJC-240.

—Jon Pepper

SuperScript 100C, NEC, 800-632-4636; \$169.

Olympus D-200L

High-quality features and a family-friendly price

FamilyPC Score Recommended **86**

Olympus may be new to the digital camera scene, but one look at the D-200L shows the company has learned from other manufacturers' mistakes. With ample picture storage, good image quality, and a reasonable price, the D-200L is a good deal for families interested in digital imaging.

Olympus takes advantage of its expertise in conventional photography to give the D-200L more of the look and feel of traditional point-and-shoot cameras than many earlier digital cameras. You can frame pictures either through the viewfinder or with the built-in 1.8-inch LCD panel, which also serves as a playback device for your photos. You can turn off the panel to conserve battery power.

Sharp Olympus optics and the 640- by 480-

REVIEWS

pixel-per-inch resolution produce crisp, clear images with good color balance. You can store 20 pictures in this high-resolution mode, or 80 images at standard quality (320 by 240 ppi). However, the standard resolution is best for viewing images on-screen and is not recommended for printing.

The camera has a built-in flash with red-eye reduction, lets you shoot in normal and close-up modes, comes with a self-timer, and can record the date and time with your photos. Olympus includes the software (for both Mac and Windows systems) you'll need to download images, a serial cable that connects the camera to your computer, and a copy of Adobe PhotoDeluxe for image editing and photo projects.

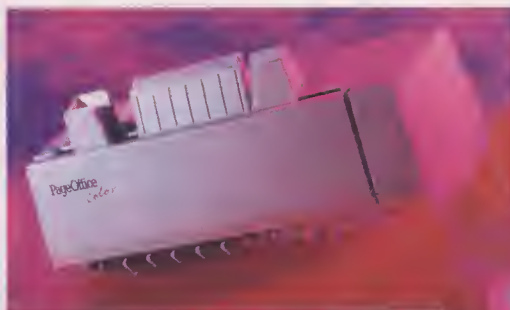
At \$599, the Olympus D-200L is a fun, well-designed camera that offers quality features at a fair price. If your family is in the market for a digital camera, the D-200L is a fine choice.

—Jon Pepper

D-200L, Olympus America, 800-347-4027; \$599 street.



Smile The Olympus D-200L has the look and feel of a traditional camera.



Choices, Choices Umax (left) and Logitech (right) offer affordable color sheet-fed scanners that are suitable for both home projects and home offices.



projects for both home office and family fun. NewSoft's Presto PageManager offers faxing, filing, copying, and printing of scanned documents, along with OCR (optical character recognition) capability. A copy of Adobe's popular PhotoDeluxe (FamilyPC Recommended; see this issue's FamilyTested Software) lets your family edit photos to use in cards, calendars, and other projects.

The 300- by 600-dot-per-inch scanner's image quality is fine for work-at-home applications and photographs. It's a cut below that of some of the higher-end flatbed models, but given the PageOffice's portability and color capabilities, we expect some trade-offs.

If you want a scanner for creative, colorful projects as well as basic office tasks, the Umax PageOffice Color is a reliable, affordable choice.

—Jon Pepper

PageOffice Color, Umax, 800-562-0311; \$249.

Logitech PageScan Color Pro

A slick and sensible scanner

The PageScan has 200- by 400-dpi optical resolution, somewhat lower than that of the Umax PageOffice Color, but it did a good job at rendering both color photos and gray-scale images. Though some scanners have slightly higher optical resolution (the Umax scanner is 300 by 600 dpi), the results from the PageScan didn't appear markedly different from the original, either on-screen or when printed from a color ink-jet.

Where the PageScan distinguishes itself is in its flexibility. It has a 10-page automatic document feeder and accepts pages from either the front or the rear. Even more useful is the detachable scanning head that lets you scan bound pages in books, something no similar product can do.

At \$349, the PageScan Color Pro costs more than the Umax PageOffice or Storm EasyPhoto SmartPage, but that's its only drawback. It may not be the budget choice, but if you want a quality desktop scanner that can scan bound pages, it's the only choice.

—Jon Pepper

h, 800-231-7717; \$349.

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nended Systems

Score

-MHz Pentium)	93
Pentium).	93
00-MHz Pentium)	91
200-MHz Pentium)	90
entium)	90
)	89
)	89
4z Pentium)	88
ase 180	88
7285	87
.	87
'00-MHz Pentium)	87
a 6400/200	86
.	86
rtium)	85

REVIEWS

ily add memory or upgrade the notebook's hard drive by popping open the keyboard. We were disappointed with the single-speaker built-in sound — most notebooks have two speakers. We also prefer longer-lasting lithium-ion batteries instead of the nickel-metal-hydride battery used in this notebook.

One fun difference about the 1400cs is the addition of a clear, hard-plastic casing on one side of the notebook. Apple includes a selection of art sheets that you can slide under the casing to personalize your notebook, much like putting a book cover on a textbook. Of course, you can also create your own art or slip photos underneath.

If cost is your primary consideration when it comes to choosing a notebook, then you're better off looking at less expensive Windows 95 laptops. But if you're a devoted Mac user, you won't be disappointed by the PowerBook 1400cs — as long as you're willing to pay the premium.

—Eric Griffith

PowerBook 1400cs/117, Apple Computer, 800-538-9696; \$2900.

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Umax PageOffice Color

Affordable color scanning

FamilyPC Score Recommended 88

The Umax PageOffice Color sheet-fed scanner is designed for families who want to scan color photos for creative projects as well as black-and-white documents for work-at-home tasks. At \$249 and 3.5 pounds, this compact and affordable scanner handles everything from in-putting color photos to placing a magazine article into a newsletter or presentation.

The Umax does well on the ease-of-use front. It is designed to share the parallel port with your printer so that both are active at the same time. We found installing the scanner and the provided software to be a simple operation.

Umax includes a software bundle that covers



projects for both home office and family fun. NewSoft's Presto PageManager offers faxing, filing, copying, and printing of scanned documents, along with OCR (optical character recognition) capability. A copy of Adobe's popular PhotoDeluxe (*FamilyPC Recommended*; see this issue's FamilyTested Software) lets your family edit photos to use in cards, calendars, and other projects.

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—Jon Pepper

PageOffice Color, Umax, 800-562-0311; \$249.

Logitech PageScan Color Pro

A slick and sensible scanner

FamilyPC Score Recommended 89

The PageScan Color Pro, Logitech's color sheet-fed scanner, handles chores ranging from creative home projects to home-office business presentations. Although higher priced than the Umax scanner, the PageScan (\$349) offers more flexible features, such as a removable scanning head.

Like most desktop (sheet-fed) scanners, the PageScan attaches directly to the parallel port so the scanner and printer can operate on the same port. Setting up the scanner is simple; it takes about 10 minutes to get it up and running.

Designed to work with Windows 95, the PageScan comes with a software "control center" that lets you scan, file, or fax any scanned documents (you of course need a fax modem for the latter). You get both Xerox TextBridge OCR, an accurate and easy-to-use program, and Adobe PhotoDeluxe, a *FamilyPC Recommended* image-editing program. You can launch either program from the software control center.

Choices, Choices Umax (left) and Logitech (right) offer affordable color sheet-fed scanners that are suitable for both home projects and home offices.



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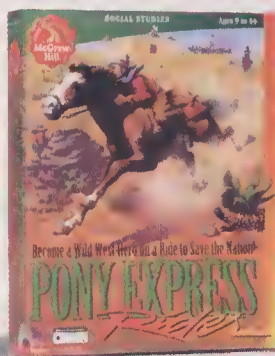
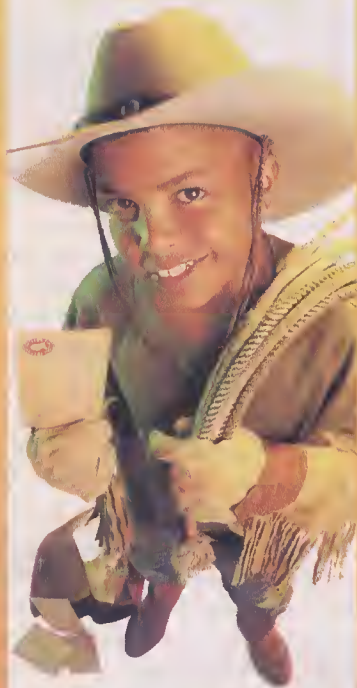
—Jon Pepper

PageScan Color Pro, Logitech, 800-231-7717; \$349.

Recently Recommended Systems

Systems	Score
Toshiba Infinia 7200 (200-MHz Pentium)	93
IBM Aptiva 77 (200-MHz Pentium)	93
Compaq Presario 4716 (200-MHz Pentium)	91
Micron Home MPC P200 (200-MHz Pentium)	90
Sony PVC-90 (200-MHz Pentium)	90
Macintosh Performa 6360 (160-MHz PowerPC 603e)	89
NEC Ready 9629 (200-MHz Pentium)	88
Power Computing Powerbase 180 (180-MHz 603e)	88
Hewlett-Packard Pavilion 7285 (200-MHz Pentium)	87
MidWest Micro P5-200 (200-MHz Pentium)	87
Apple Macintosh Performa 6400/200 (200-MHz 603e)	86
Aptiva S78 (200-MHz Pentium)	85

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REVIEWS

Software

The world on CD-ROM: three new interactive atlases; a look at the 20th century; remembering the Alamo

Atlases have always been an important part of the family library, along with a dictionary and an encyclopedia. The massive books of maps and statistical data present an in-depth and visual way to explore the geography and politics of the world.

The multimedia version of the world atlas has gone far beyond its paper cousins, and the 1997 class of multimedia world atlases features a new generation of technical improvements. Most notably, these atlases all use a drag tool for navigating the globe and have some form of 3-D modeled view that allows you to "fly over" a landscape or region for multiple perspectives. The three products featured here also have pushpin-type markers that you can place to

music. Zooming has been improved to provide a remarkable level of detail. Web links are de rigueur, and all three titles address ecological problems. While the three atlases share common ground, there are significant differences in both content and presentation.

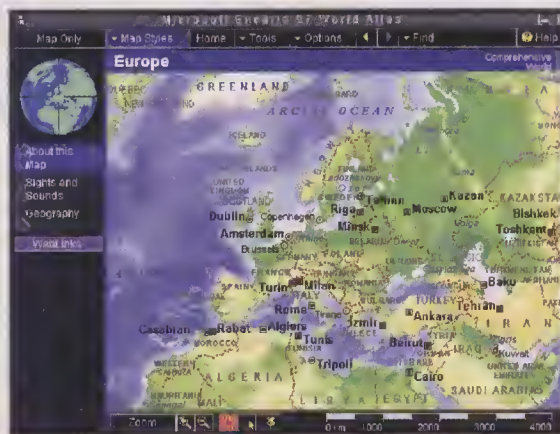
Microsoft Encarta '97 World Atlas

A world of maps and multimedia

FamilyPC Score Recommended **89**

Encarta '97 rates high for the reference purposes for which most people buy atlases. With 14 map styles, street-level maps, and in-depth cultural explorations, it has the widest scope of the three atlases reviewed here.

The maps are grouped into four categories (physical, satellite, nature, and human), each with several zoom levels. Terrain detail — even in the oceans — is much more tactile and detailed than in previous versions. Thirty family portraits feature families from different cultures, with video, photos, and text. The Internet link is practical and helpful. If you are looking at a map of Chile, for instance, you can link to a Microsoft Web site that



Just the Maps Encarta's zooming feature offers excellent political and physical detail.

personalize the maps, the way you might use a bookmark in a printed atlas.

The atlases are rich in political and statistical data about population, natural resources, languages, and more, and they address the human element through photos, videos, and

will provide weather, local news, and travel advisories. Street-level maps for 50 cities and a measuring tool let you easily draw a line between two locations and get a distance reading in either kilometers or miles.

Microsoft reference products use a standard

design, so if you have used Cinemania, Bookshelf, or even Internet Explorer, you will be comfortable with the simple, clear, and efficient interface of Encarta '97 World Atlas.

Microsoft, 800-426-9400 or 206-882-8080; Windows 95 CD, \$54.95.

Global Look 3D Atlas explores environmental issues, such as continental drift.



ABC World Reference 3D Atlas '97

Strong on environmental issues

FamilyPC Score **Recommended 87**

If you're looking for an atlas with lots of information about the earth's ecology, 3D Atlas is the one to get. Issues such as extinction, oil pollution, and ozone are explored using narrated videos, photos, and text. You can even watch a hole spread across the ozone layer above the South Pole in a narrated time-lapse sequence. The atlas also provides excellent animated descriptions of geophysical phenomena such as continental drift, tectonic plates, ocean currents, and wind patterns, as well as an explanation of the world clock.

3D Atlas is known for its satellite maps, which are impressive, but it relies much too heavily on them, and they in fact deliver little useful information. The time-lapse satellite photos of the eruption of Mount Pinatubo provide a unique global perspective on a catastrophic event, but when you're looking at a map of San Francisco you want the streets, bridges, and landmarks, not a quasi-astronaut experience. On the positive side, 3D Atlas is easy to navigate, thanks to an interface based on

a 3-D globe and pull-down menus for accessing the statistics, stories, and maps.

Just for fun, the Around the World trivia quiz tests your knowledge of flags and geography. Wonderlink takes you to the Web (or an America Online site if you're a subscriber) to download current events.

Creative Wonders, 800-543-9788 or 415-482-2300; Mac and Windows CD, \$49.95.

Compton's Interactive World Atlas

A basic atlas

FamilyPC Score **84**

This competent but uninspired atlas, which comes bundled with Compton's Street Guide, offers all the usual atlas features. The interface is basic and easy to navigate, with buttons running along the top that let you delve deeper into each country you're looking at.

You can zoom in on any of the 600 maps, though you can't get down to street level. For the country you've selected, you can see and hear a variety of information, including a list of Olympic winners and examples of the native language.

The Mother Earth section has 17 narrated videos that highlight the Earth's natural phenomena and man-made problems such as acid rain. Through animated videos, the Weather Station provides outstanding explanations of weather phenomena such as ice caps, jet streams, tornadoes, hurricanes, and high and low pressure. For fun and some added perspective, a



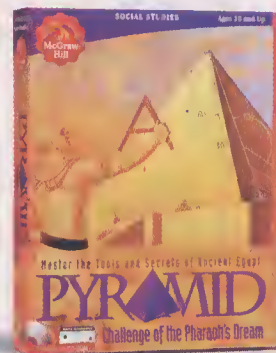
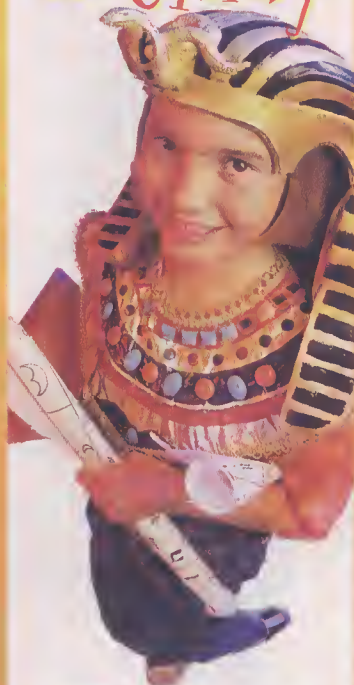
Room for Better Views Compton's atlas is just average at the country level.

3-D flight simulator allows you to control your flight over vast regions like the Andes Mountains.

—Marianne Cotter

Compton's Home Library, 800-227-5609 or 510-792-2101; Windows CD, \$50.

Tutankhamen, Rameses IV, Cleopatra, & Cindy



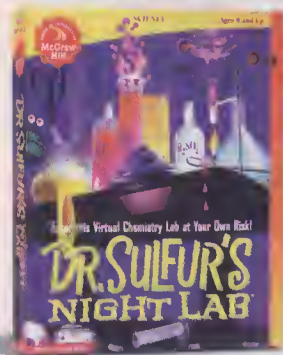
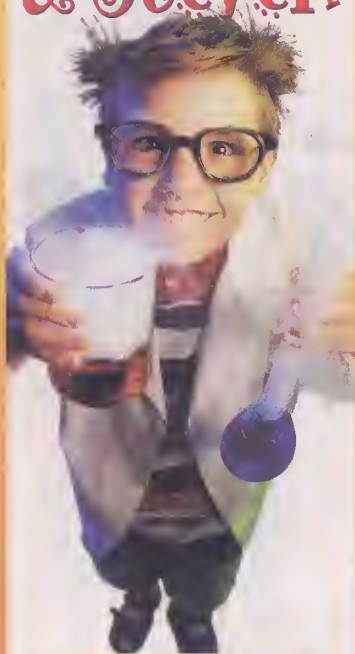
As the masterminds behind building a towering pyramid, your kids turn a young Pharaoh's dream into reality. Working with the unusual tools and unique culture, kids uncover the mysteries of an ancient time, not to mention a few dusty surprises.

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REVIEWS



Musical Fun Kids turn paintings and bugs into musical creations.

SimTunes

You'll love these software bugs

FamilyPC Score Recommended **88**

What do you get when you cross a kids' painting program with a MIDI music studio and a bunch of cute crawly bugs? The answer is a clever musical creativity tool for kids ages eight and up.

In SimTunes, creating music is as easy as brushing colors on an on-screen canvas. Each colored dot you paint represents a musical note.

You can also place animated bugs on the screen, up to four at a time. Each bug represents a different instrument, such as a trumpet, harmonica, or drum, and when the bug scurries over a colored dot it plays a note with that instrument. There are 100 musical stamps — colored images, letters, and patterns — to help you decorate your musical pictures and get you up and running quickly.

It's a bit difficult at first to get the hang of painting with music without making a cacophonous mess of things. But the program has a great tutorial that walks you through all your options.

There's no other program — and certainly nothing outside of the computer — quite like SimTunes. It may not get your kids a job with the philharmonic, but it will endlessly entertain and inspire them.

—Kurt Carlson

Maxis, 800-336-2947 or 510-933-5630; Windows CD, \$34.95 street; ages 8 and up.

Daily Planet View newspaper-style headlines from a particular month and year.

Chronicle of the 20th Century

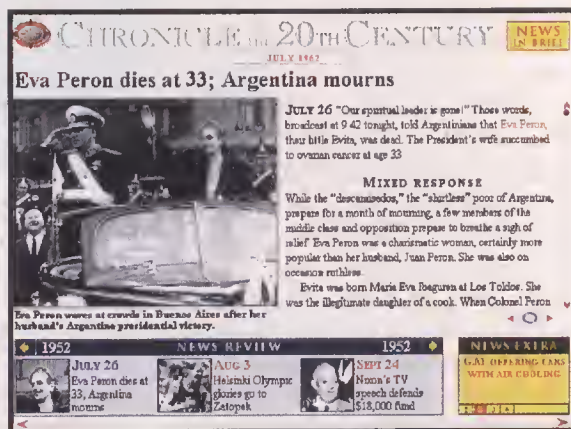
Browse the events that shaped the century

FamilyPC Score Recommended **89**

Your ticket to the events that defined the twentieth century begins in an old-style newsroom at a fictitious newspaper. The office doesn't even have a computer, yet every object is loaded with digital memories of the people and events that shaped the century. An old radio provides random audio clips, including President Bush's "read my lips" speech. Open a desk drawer and click on a gun to find out about the day John Lennon was killed. A typewriter taps out random headlines that you can click on to view the news story. And a black rotary phone stands ready to dial up your connection to DK Multimedia's Web site, where you can see more photos, test your knowledge of history in the Time Out quiz, and even submit your own stories about the century.

The newsroom is not the only way to the information in the program. A retractable toolbar lays out your navigation options. The primary one is newscreens, simulated newspaper pages for every month of every year of the century. The 20th Century in Focus section offers themed interactive documentaries on such subjects as the Russian revolution and space exploration. A search option provides a listing for every day of the century through 1996 (that's about 34,000 days).

With this kind of scope, the content is not especially deep; indeed, most articles are just a few paragraphs long. But many encyclopedias (both print and multimedia) offer little more. Chronicles, which is nicely designed and attractively delivered, is a sweeping look at the whole of life in the twentieth century that will



appeal to students and anyone curious about our past.

—Marianne Cotter

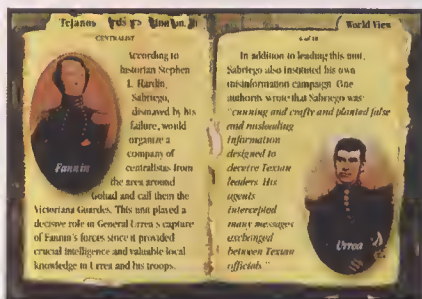
DK Multimedia, 800-356-6575 or 212-213-4800; Mac and Windows CD, \$49.95 street.

The Alamo: "Victory or Death"

Stand where Davy Crockett fell

FamilyPC Score Recommended 89

We all know we're supposed to remember the Alamo, but not too many of us remember why.



Alamo Story A detailed look at the famous siege.

History buffs and curious students alike will love this vividly detailed and entertaining retelling of the 1836 siege and battle of the Alamo.

The disc features beautiful graphics, a comprehensive timetable of events (including a step-by-step play of the siege and the entire battle, with animation of General Santa Anna's Mexican Army troops traversing your screen) — even a detailed tour of the Alamo, with commentary and a built-in scavenger hunt.

You can listen to Dan Rather, Sissy Spacek, Robert Earl Keen, or Freddy Fender narrate a particular phase of the event, or you can follow it with plain old text accompanied by beautifully rendered images. The sections are broken down into three modules — The Battles, History, and The Missions — and they get progressively deeper and more detailed the further you go, taking you from a broad historical context to a minute-by-minute account of the final 2-hour battle.

One of the most fascinating sections is a full archive of dozens of artifacts related to the battle — for example, yellowed letters written from the heart of the siege by William Barrett Travis, commander of the Texas forces.

Other highlights include a game section, a selection of period songs, and biographies of notable people in the siege.

—Philip Price

Archimedia Interactive, 800-925-2669 or 214-880-9090; Mac and Windows CD, \$59.95.

Leonardo da Vinci

The artist and the inventor

FamilyPC Score Recommended 90

Leonardo da Vinci had one of the most encompassing intellects in history, making considerable contributions to art, anatomy, astronomy, natural history, and engineering. Exploring his life and work digitally in any comprehensive fashion would seem to be a gigabyte-laden task. And yet this CD-ROM does it quite elegantly, through exhibits, multimedia tours, and virtual galleries.

A virtual gallery places you in a rotunda surrounded by eight rooms, each of which contains different works such as paintings, documents, and studies. Here you find the Mona Lisa, The Annunciation, and other masterpieces, which you can zoom in on for a more detailed look.

Because Bill Gates (owner of Corbis) purchased one of da Vinci's handwritten journals, The Codex Leicester, the entire manuscript is included on the disc, along with a remarkable tool called The Codescope that lets you access the original manuscript.

The Codescope is not just a translation tool. Da Vinci was left-handed and wrote backwards from right to left. The Codescope creates a mirror image of the text in either Italian or English.



Art Up Close Zoom in to the masterpieces for a closer look.

The pages are indexed for content, making this program an excellent scholarly resource, but one that is not entirely without humor. The ending credits show a series of tongue-in-cheek interpretations of the Mona Lisa by Marcel Duchamp (with mustache), Andy Warhol (multiple images), and Jim Henson (Mona Pigga).

—Marianne Cotter

Corbis, 800-246-2065 or 206-641-4505; Mac and Windows CD, \$49.95.

Einstein, Pascal, Descartes, & Julie



Inside the wacky Fennel family abode, your kids must frantically get ready for an impromptu party by solving dynamic math puzzles and story problems. With lively and bizarre challenges of everyday math, it's a hilarious adventure that just keeps multiplying in fun.

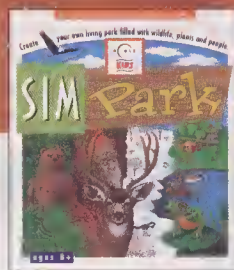
To order this CD-ROM call 800-937-HOME Just \$29.95



The Premier Educational Publisher
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Meet the dominant species in SimPark.



Creating and running his own nature park makes him king of the jungle—not to mention the forest, meadow and desert. Because SimPark™ is the first game that lets kids rule entire ecosystems—by introducing a diverse blend of flora and fauna. Kids choose from 132 species and follow the food chain firsthand. They keep humans from harming park harmony. They learn why some plants prefer the plains, and some cling to the coast. And with millions of acres to roam, their knowledge of nature never stops growing.



MAXIS
KIDS

Power to the
little people.



©1996 Maxis, Inc. All rights reserved. SimPark is a trademark and Maxis Kids is a registered trademark of Maxis, Inc. For product information call 510-927-3900. Visit the Maxis Web page at <http://www.maxis.com>. ESRB rated for Kids to Adults.

REVIEWS

Games

Build your own pinball game, off road racing in a 4x4, save aliens in this cartoon adventure

Pinball Builder

Create customized pinball tables

Simulation **FamilyPC Score 87**

21st Century's Pinball Builder allows you to create your own tables using 32 templates. You can tweak the amount of points components award, sound effects, number of players, number of balls per game, multiball or extra balls,



Pick a Pinball Pattern Trade your tailor-made tables.

flipper controls, and table angle. You can be creative with each template and vary objects such as lamps, decals, jets, kickers, and touchpads.

Building a table is easy; you should be able to create and begin playing your first game in less than an hour. Simply click on the Workshop Create button, choose a basic template, and get to work. To place an object, you push a button and drag the object to the table. (Unfortunately, some objects can be placed only in certain areas on the table, which may cramp your style but will ensure your table works; and you cannot add extra flippers.) To customize your table,

you can import your own graphics or edit pre-made objects in the library. —*Fern Spira*

21st Century Entertainment, 716-872-1200; Windows CD, \$49.95; ages 10 and up.

The Real Adventures of Jonny Quest: Cover-Up at Roswell

Jonny and Hadji high jinks

Adventure **FamilyPC Score 87**

An alien spaceship enters the atmosphere and splinters into five pieces before exploding in the New Mexico desert. The government is trying to hush it up, but you can help Jonny Quest and his friends Jessie and Hadji complete five missions to find the missing pieces and help the stranded alien on his way. To assist you in your task, several tools are available, including a global positioning device to help you get oriented in each new country.

You solve puzzles in each mission — 37 in all, ranging in sophistication from using a sling-shot to kill rats in a subway to eliminating computer viruses to working your way through a maze in the jungle. The game maintains a nice momentum by alternating exploration and puzzle-solving with video sequences. Characters nudge you in the right direction, and a help feature provides solutions to puzzles. Navigation



is easy with the mouse, while the included 3-D glasses provide some added visual impact. Jonny Quest combines high-tech tools with outdoor environments and local cultures for an engaging adventure. —*Marianne Cotter*

Virgin Sound and Vision, 800-814-3530 or 310-246-4666; Mac and Windows CD, \$34.95; ages 8 to 12.

Test Drive: Off-Road

Drive the road less traveled

Simulation **FamilyPC Score 87**

From dirt-spraying power slides (just yank the hand brake and turn the wheel) to high-speed, mid-jump collisions, Test Drive: Off-Road brings the gritty thrill of racing big 4x4s to your computer. Off-Road features a superb 3-D en-



Shortcut Strategy When you don't have to stay in between the lines.

gine that delivers smooth, crisp graphics. It supports multiplayer action over a network or via modem, but you'll find that just racing against the computer is a gas — especially if you use the nine camera angles or the replay mode.

The game features 12 courses. Some are coated in snow and ice, while others are made of sand and dirt, and you can feel the difference in handling. Off-Road also lets you race in either the monster-truck-like Chevy K-1500 Z71, the robust Hummer, the speedy Jeep Wrangler, or the agile Land Rover Defender 90, each of which handles differently but all of which are indestructible. As you race, you'll find that each course has a variety of shortcuts; though it takes some exploring to find them, that's what makes Off-Road fun. —*Samuel Mead*

Accolade, 800-245-7744 or 408-985-1700; DOS and Windows CD, \$49.95; ages 13 and up.

Quest Cruise Jonny's adventure leads to Peru and Bermuda.



Now your kids can really play *the blues*.

And the **reds** and **greens** and **yellows**, too. Because SimTunes™ is the creativity cross-trainer: the first program that lets kids compose musical pictures—without art or music lessons. They simply draw with colored dots that double as musical notes. Then they choose their instruments—including drums, piano, even voices—and turn their painting into a performance. When they change the picture, they change the tune. They can even rehearse in a gallery of over 40 pre-made designs. So just wait till you hear the beautiful pictures your kids make with SimTunes. It's music to their eyes.



Select 4 Bugz from 40 choices ranging from musical instruments to zany sound effects.



Bugz crawl across colored dots representing different notes, creating a lively musical picture.



Create musical pictures to share with friends and family.



Power to the
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Parlez-Vous avec le PC?

YOUR PC SHOWS PROMISE IN HELPING YOU
AND YOUR KIDS LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

MY TWO-YEAR-OLD loves to mimic his sister singing the French song "Sur le Pont d'Avignon." When he gets to the end, where the people are dancing *tout en rond* (all around), his *rond* comes out with such a perfect nasal honk that you'd think he was a native Parisian (or part goose). Truth is, he's neither. It's just that young children have an amazing ability to absorb foreign languages and adopt perfect accents.

There are many reasons for this phenomenon. To begin with, young kids are uninhibited about making new sounds (as you've probably noticed). New sounds are physically easier at this age, too: Their mouths are not yet used to a single way of speaking (which is where accent and inflection come from). Plus, foreign languages appeal to a child's sense of mystery, mimicry, and curiosity.

Unfortunately, most kids don't have the opportunity to study a foreign language until seventh grade — right about the time they're getting self-conscious about everything. For the same reasons, if you're an adult hoping to pick up a little conversational ability in a foreign language, you're going to need as much help, practice, and support as you can get. So

what's a globally conscious, monolingual parent to do?

The short answer, according to language experts, is to expose your children to the language as early and as often as possible. And, assuming you don't speak a second language at home, one of the best ways to create exposure

they are actually using the target language in a variety of ways immediately. And using language, say the experts, is the key to acquiring it (just think about how we learn to speak our native language: immersion first, grammar later).

The multimedia immersion approach



Learn to Speak French You can see, hear, and speak along with narrations of familiar foreign places.

is with your family PC and a multimedia foreign language software program.

The Immersion Method

Language experts believe that the best programs take the immersion approach to teaching a foreign language. With this approach, no English is spoken after the introduction (although translations are available at the click of a button). Instead, live-action video of native speakers, descriptive graphics, amusing sound effects, interactive games, and interesting exercises draw students in so

differs from the teacher-centered, grammar-and-translation method of learning a foreign language. With that approach, students interact mostly with the teacher (who speaks a lot of English in class) and with their books. Students who study this way can conjugate dozens of verbs perfectly and use the dictionary at lightning speed but have trouble engaging in creative conversation. With its stress on repetition, rote memoriza-

tion, and endless dull exercises, learning a language this way isn't much fun, either.

But with immersion-based software, students interact with the language in a light, fun way. There are programs that map well not only to your skill level — beginner, intermediate, or advanced — but also to your age. After all, you're not going to teach adult beginners the same way you'd teach beginners still into *Sesame Street*.

The approaches in the software vary: You can learn idiomatic expressions, vocabulary, and grammar as you take a tour of a for-

PARENTAL GUIDANCE

aign city in LanguageNow; expose a diamond thief in Who Is Oscar Lake?; or play a game of concentration in Learn to Speak 6.0 or All-in-One Language Fun. Most programs have record-and-playback features that (provided you have a microphone-equipped PC) let you compare your pronunciation to that of a native speaker. (Talk to Me, a new product from Globalink, 703-273-5600, will be based primarily on spoken interaction.) Others, like the top-ranked LanguageNow, let you slow down the speech of native speakers so that you can work on listening skills more easily. Some programs

Hands-On LANGUAGE

Thumbs-up for The American Sign Language CD-ROM

With sign language, seeing is believing, and *The American Sign Language Dictionary 2.0* on CD-ROM (Mac and Windows, \$34.95; Multicom Publishing, 800-850-7272 or 415-777-5300) gives anyone interested in learning more about the language a lot to see.

The American Sign Language Dictionary combines animation and video with text, tests, and games that put it head-and-shoulders above static handbooks. Learning signs from a book is difficult because it's hard to illustrate the position of the fingers and the movement of the hands.

Aside from the alphabet and 2400 words (all illustrated with video), the pro-



gram provides descriptions of more abstract concepts, such as rhetorical questions, grammatical features (the adverb follows the verb), and even what to wear when signing (plain clothing, no fancy jewelry). An online connection lets you add new signs to the database.

even feature speech recognition technology, which actually evaluates your pronunciation and allows you to have a conversation with the computer. Keep in mind, though, that this technology is not perfect — in many cases, the computer mistakenly assumes a spoken response is correct when it is not, or vice versa.

Time Is the Key

So with all these features, you and your kids are bound to be speaking a second language fluently in a few short sessions, right? Not exactly. Foreign language software, like the computer itself, is a learning tool. Even the best tools can't do the job all by themselves. They make the work easier.

In addition, the software has some limitations — the biggest one being that it's not a person and therefore cannot interact with you in a spontaneous way. For example, many of the programs put you in real-life situations and teach you how to do such things as get a hotel room, order food in a restaurant, and ask directions. And even though some of the programs feature branching conversations (in which your answers determine the outcome of the discussion), you will mostly learn how to answer a question that has been asked in a particular way. As a result, you can't really have a creative conversation.

“A program can only speak back to you with limited responses,” according to David Herren, a language and technology expert at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont. “To really learn a language, you’ve got to be exposed to the full range of human expression along with language. You need to get unpredictable responses and then figure out the meaning with other cues.”

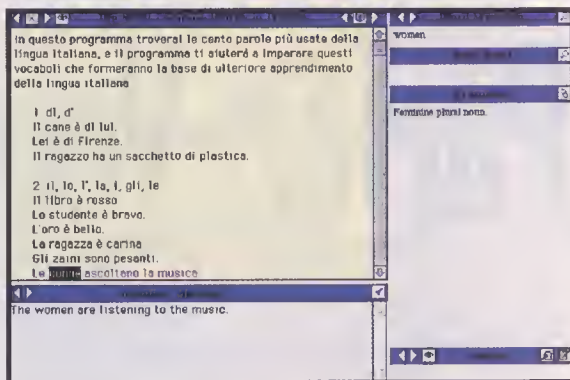
Language Limits

So how much language can you expect to acquire, despite these limitations? If you're an absolute beginner, multimedia foreign language programs can probably teach you to communicate in the target language in a basic way.

"You need between 500 and 800 words to

get by in any language," said Robert Miller, chairman and CEO of Language Publications Interactive, publishers of the Oscar Lake series. "If you can recognize things being asked of you and can answer simple questions, you'll get by."

If you or your child has some background



ItalianNow Once you're ready for grammar lessons, programs like ItalianNow give you all you need to know.

in the language — perhaps you took it back in high school and your child is taking it now — these programs can really help bring your speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills up to a much higher level. But to make the most progress of all, you and your kids should combine the software with a foreign language class.

Joseph Mwantuali, assistant professor of French at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, has used technology extensively in his classroom. "It's possible to learn a foreign language without a teacher," he says, "but it takes much longer. For best results, software should be used in conjunction with a class."

This advice is supported by research. Professor Deborah Baldini of the University of Missouri at St. Louis tested several groups of students using Transparent Language's SpanishNow software over a two-year period; she found that students who used it consistently showed better comprehension, faster understanding, and less frustration. The study concluded that the need to look up information in the dictionary and in textbooks interrupted student learning. The immediate feedback available through the software made learning smoother and easier. The bottom line is that these programs are great if you're a motivated student and you temper your expectations with the understanding that, no matter how you go about it, it takes a

PARENTAL GUIDANCE

long time to speak a foreign language well. (If you're planning a quick trip, the Learning Company just released Travel Talk, an interactive tutorial aimed at adults looking to learn a lot fast.)

Still, there are some things you can do to make learning as easy as possible. For example, you and your kids should spend a lot of time exploring the programs without being too worried about absorbing everything right away. You should also be sure to choose a program appropriate for your language level. True beginner programs focus more on vocabulary and basic conversation than on that scary monster called grammar, while some of the beginner/intermediate programs assume you understand some basic grammatical concepts (that there are different tenses, that verbs need to be conjugated, and so on). In addition, beginners may become frustrated or overwhelmed by the flexible approach of some of the intermediate programs: Instead of having numbered lessons to lead you through the

learning process, they feature a loose structure that lets you jump in anywhere you like and move around the program based on your interests.

The Final Word

One last bit of advice: While you're learning, don't forget that these programs are not the only ways to have fun with language and integrate it into your life. If you or your child is going to learn a foreign language, you may as well make it a family affair. For instance, you can have foreign culture nights at home with your kids, where you invite a foreign language speaker to dinner, eat foreign food, and explore some aspect of the culture. You can also read a familiar story to your child in a

foreign language, or play a storybook CD-ROM on your computer with the foreign language feature turned on. And for those rainy Sunday afternoons, you can even pop some popcorn and cuddle up with your family and a good foreign film.

Finally, remember that it takes years to



Diamonds Aren't Forever The Oscar Lake series is really a foreign language mystery.

learn to speak your native tongue fluently, so don't be too hard on yourself — have fun and laissez les bons temps (and your tongue) rouler.

Cristine Santo is a frequent contributor to FamilyPC. E-mail her at CrisSanto@aol.com.

Foreign Language FEATURES

Product	Languages	Format, estimated street price; level; age	Description and features	Comments	Score
LanguageNow, Transparent Language, 800-752-1767 or 603-465-2230	Spanish, French, German, Italian, Latin, Russian, English	Mac and Windows CD, \$69; beginner/intermediate; 12 to adult	Teaches through stories, articles, games, video tours. Record & playback; flexible or structural approach; speech-slowness feature. Immersion.	Great for different ability levels. Helpful info panels; easy navigation; good orientation; lots of hints and reassurance.	93
Learn to Speak 6.0, The Learning Company, 800-227-5609	Spanish, French, German, Japanese, English	Mac and Windows CD, \$100; beginner/intermediate; 14 to adult	Lessons, games, culture, movies, workbook; speech recognition. Comprehensive course; (Windows only) record & playback.	Very well organized. Flexible format; easy to use; good for different levels.	92
All-in-One Language Fun, Syracuse Language Systems, 800-797-5264 or 315-478-6729	Spanish, French, German, Japanese, English	Mac and Windows CD, \$20; beginner; 3 to 12	Teaches through games and puzzles. Immersion.	Designed especially for kids. Five languages on one CD.	88
Your Way 2.0, Random House and Syracuse Language Systems, 800-797-5264 or 315-478-6729	Spanish, French	Windows CD, \$89; beginner/intermediate; 14 to adult	Speech recognition, branching conversations, games, activities. Online language classes (\$475 extra); flexible curriculum; record & playback. Immersion.	Very well designed. Easy to navigate; comprehensive.	87
TriplePlay Plus, Random House and Syracuse Language Systems, 800-797-5264 or 315-478-6729	Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Hebrew, English	Windows CD, \$70; beginner/intermediate; 8 to adult	Speech recognition; based on games and comic strips. Record & playback. Immersion.	Great for kids and beginners. Easy, effective. Limited grammar; more basic than Your Way.	86
Who Is Oscar Lake?, Language Publications Interactive, 800-882-6700	Spanish, French, German, Italian, English	Mac and Windows CD, \$50; beginner; 12 to adult	Learning adventure game; virtual 3-D environment; interact with characters in live-action video. Record & playback; multiple story endings.	Unique, fun; great atmosphere. Navigation takes some practice; limited grammar. A likely hit with teenagers. Some may find game format a bit distracting.	84
Berlitz Think & Talk 2.0, The Learning Company, 800-227-5609	Spanish, French, German, Italian	Mac and Windows CD, \$130; beginner; 14 to adult	Builds intro conversation skills through lessons, graphics, scenes; speech recognition. Record & playback. Immersion.	A sound, easy-to-use program, but not much fun. No games.	82
To Go Series, RXL Pulitzer & Creative Multimedia, 800-262-7668	Spanish, French, Japanese	Windows CD (also Spanish-only Mac CD), \$49.95; beginner; 12 to adult	Instructor-led tutorials; skits; games. Record & playback; tests.	Instructor not a native speaker; lots of English spoken. A bit corny — life-size animal puppets in skits. DK for traditional teacher-led approach.	75

HELP & ADVICE

GET YOUR PC TO WORK FOR YOU

Professor Poor: PROBLEM SOLVER

BY ALFRED POOR

Conserve system resources, learn about zipping your files, and deal with duplicate DLLs

Running on Empty

Dear Professor,

Every time I try to run more than one program at a time on my Windows 3.11 system — with 12MB of memory — I run out of system resources. I have 75 percent resources free when I first boot up, but that drops to 45 percent when I load Word for Windows. If I try to load another program, I often get an error message. I have run MEMMAKER and increased the virtual memory settings, but that has not helped. Do you have any suggestions?

Doug Sehorne, *via the Internet*

Dear Doug,

The resources you're short of are portions of the system memory (called *heaps*) that Windows sets aside for different housekeeping functions, such as keeping track of icons, fonts, and open windows. Whenever your system resources drop much below 40

Check the Gauge Program Manager reports system resources when you choose the About Program Manager item from the Help menu.

percent, your system is liable to crash. The ironic thing about system resources is that they can become filled even though you still have plenty of available memory. Changing MEMMAKER and your virtual memory settings won't have much effect on the problem, but there are a few things you can do to help relieve the shortage.

Program Manager icons can use up system resources, so keep as many groups minimized as possible. Don't use a wallpaper image on your desktop, or if you must, then use a tiny image and tile it. Don't have more fonts installed than you need — get a font management utility to uninstall and install extra fonts as needed.

Additional memory is usually of little help in these cases, because the size of your system



resources doesn't increase as you put more memory into your computer. However, you may want to try a memory compression utility, such as Hurricane from Helix Software. Such a program makes more efficient use of the memory resources and can reduce or eliminate the problems you're having.

Time-Saver

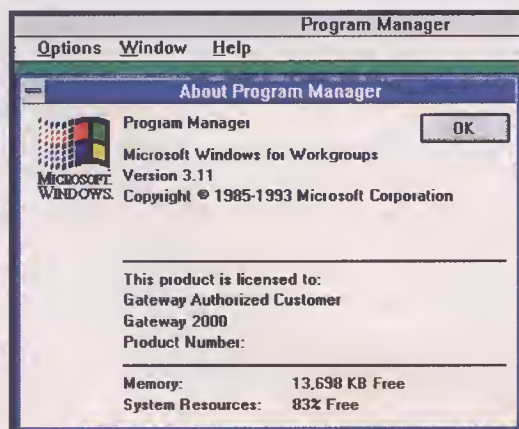
Dear Professor,

When I download software from a Web site, I wind up with something called a zip file. What is a zip file, and how do I use it?

Gary M. Tsai, *via the Internet*

Dear Gary,

Files you download from the Internet are often very large. A zip file contains one or more files that have been compressed by PKZip, a popular file compression utility. When you compress a file, you make it smaller by removing redundant data. Because compressed files are smaller than uncom-



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Buena Vista	2B	155	McGraw-Hill Pony Express		132
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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54
55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63
64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72
73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81
82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99
100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108
109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117
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BY ALFRED POOR

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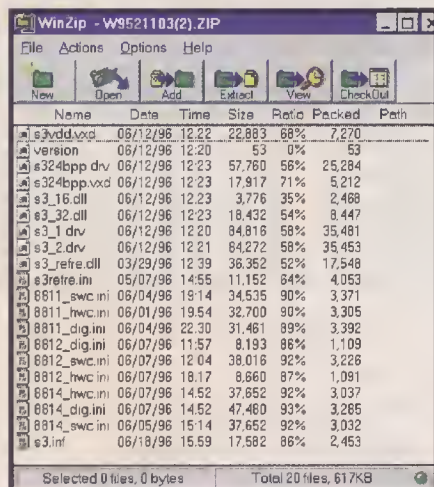
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Advertiser	RS#	Page	Advertiser	RS#	Page
A.D.A.M. Software	31	115	Iomega	29	35
Ark Interface		147	Jump Software	13	128
Argos Gameware	32	74	Konica Online Photo	37	27
At Home Professions	1	156	LaSalle University	7	157
AverMedia		123	Lexmark	22	29
Avery Dennison		32	Logitech		8
Banner Blue		65	LookSmart		56
Best Personalized Books		156	M & R Technologies	8	157
Broderbund		25	Maxis		136, 138
Buena Vista	28	155	McGraw-Hill Pony Express		132
Cakewalk Music Software	33	40	McGraw-Hill Pyramid		133
Canon		2-3	McGraw-Hill Dr. Sulfer		134
CASI		157	McGraw-Hill The Fennels Figure Math		135
Chrysler Corporation		72-73	Micron	26	62-1
Corel Corporation		111	Microsoft Picture It	20	4-5
Cybermedia		97	Mindscape	23	38
Designer Checks	4	157	Monorail	38	36-37
DK Multimedia	34	113	Microsoft Network	17	65
Dodge		19	NEC Desktops	39	30-31
Dyna Source, Inc.	3	156	NEC Monitors	42	102-103
The Edutainment Company	25	80-81	NRI Schools		95
Electric Quilt	9	157	Okidata		41
Epson America	24	20-21, 104, 105	Omnimedia	27	120
The Family Channel	35	101	Rand McNally	40	89
Family Education Network	36	62	Seagate	15	22
Florida Key On CD-Rom		156	Sega Entertainment	14	77, 79
Fujitsu	12	12-13	Sierra Online	21	59, 61
Cametek		159	Storm/Primax	18	90-91
Gateway		49-54, 55	Success Learning Systems	5	157
CMC Jimmy		125	Tempur-Pedic, Inc.		39
Headbone Interactive	16	71, 99	The Learning Co.		66
Hewlett Packard Supplies	19	66, 69	Time Warner's Pathfinder		44
Hobbyware	2	156	Toyota	30	11
Homequest	6	157	United CD Rom	41	150
I8M		17, 117, 118-119	US Robotics		6-7, 15
Interactive Education Products	10	158	Voudette	11	158
Intuit		47			

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pressed files, they transmit faster over a modem; this is why most files available for downloading from online services or Web sites are compressed.

Before you can use a zipped file, you must unzip it (i.e., you must extract the contents



Big Squeeze Zip files can act as a container for multiple compressed files and folders.

of a zip file). To do this, you need a copy of PKZip. If you don't already have it, start by downloading the current version of the program. Though PKZip is available from many sites, you can always get it directly from PKWare's Web site at www.pkware.com. The current DOS version of the software is 2.04G, and the file you download is called PK204G.EXE.

PK204G is a self-extracting archive file, which means that you simply run the program at a DOS prompt and it will extract the compressed files. The files that you get when you extract PK204G include PKZip, which you can use to compress files, and PKUnzip, which you can use to extract the original files from zip files.

If you're a Windows user, you want to download the Windows version of PKZip, which is called WinZip. To get it, you simply download the file PKZWS201.EXE. The Windows version has all the capabilities of the DOS version and is a lot easier to use.

The PKZip and WinZip utilities are share-

ware, which means that you are expected to pay to register the programs if you keep them and use them. PKWare charges \$47 for the DOS version and \$49 for the Windows version.

One word of warning: There are reports of files named PKZ300.EXE and PKZ300B.EXE available for downloading at a number of sites. These are not PKWare products, and they will reportedly act like viruses and attempt to erase the contents of your hard disk when you run them.

Though PKZip is used primarily for sending files over the wire, you can also use it to compress files on your hard disk, thus saving hard disk space. Of course, you have to then unzip any file or folder you compress before you use it.

Space Saver

Dear Professor,
I have some DLL files in my Windows directory that appear to be duplicates of files in my Sound Blaster directory. If I delete the duplicates from the second directory, will my sound programs still run correctly? I only have an 80MB drive, so I would like to delete the files if they aren't needed. Thanks.

Tom Tretter, via the Internet

Dear Tom,

There are many reasons why duplicate files may appear on your hard disk, and in general, you can remove the extra copies and

your programs will still work. Before you jump in, however, I have some guidelines you should use when removing duplicate files, especially DLLs (dynamic link libraries).

Windows 95 searches for DLL files in a distinct order. It first looks in the folder (directory) where the program is being executed and then in the current folder (if that's different). If it can't find the required DLL there, it next checks the System folder in the Windows folder and then the Windows folder. If it still can't find the DLL, it checks the folders listed in the PATH statement in your system's AUTOEXEC.BAT file. This means that one copy of a certain DLL in your System or Windows directory should be sufficient.

Before you get rid of a duplicate, however, first compare the two files. Make certain that they have the same size, time, and date. If these don't match, one may be more recent than the other. One program may require a different version of the DLL file than another program, so you may need to leave the DLL in one program's folder even though there is another DLL with the same name in another folder.

If the files are duplicates, I recommend that you rename the ones you want to get rid of before you actually delete them. Because other programs may rely on the same files, leave the copies in your System and Windows folders intact, and change only the ones in the program folders. You can change their extension from DLL to HLD (for Hold), so Windows won't recognize them as DLL files. Run all the programs you think might rely on these files, and if they run successfully, you can delete the HLDs safely.

If you don't mind spending some money, you can find numerous commercial utilities that can ferret out multiple instances of DLLs. Check out Resolve, First Aid 97, or WinCheckIT.

Alfred Poor is the author of *The Underground Guide to Troubleshooting PC Hardware* (Addison-Wesley) and often finds himself backed into corners at parties, answering questions about people's personal-computing problems. You don't have to wait for a party invitation to get your answers; send him your questions by e-mail at 418-4827@mcimail.com or by letter to Professor Poor: Problem Solver, FamilyPC, 244 Main Street, Northampton, MA 01060.





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THESE DAYS, subscribing to an online service is a piece of cake: Just install one of the thousands of disks glued into your favorite magazines or stuffed in your mailbox, and you're cruising cyberspace in a flash. If only signing off were as easy.

Some families that signed up for 10 free hours on America Online (AOL) report that ending their trial period was next to impossible. Former subscribers of Apple Computer's now-defunct eWorld service were greeted this summer by a "pay up or else" letter from an agency trying to collect charges for the final month of eWorld (for which they were never billed). Billing problems have also been reported for the Microsoft Network.

Cancel the Right Way

When it comes time to pull the plug on your online account, be it with a commercial service or an Internet service provider, follow cancellation rules to the letter or you may get a nasty surprise on your credit card bill. Every service has specific rules about how you should cancel; you can usually find instructions in the billing or customer service area.

Some services, such as the Microsoft Network, prefer that you submit an online cancellation form, which must include a comment about why you're leaving the service. AOL requires a call to an automated customer service number, where you enter the billing method you use and verify your name and address information. Regardless of which service you're leaving, print a copy of any form you submit, get names and titles of any live

representatives you speak to, and note the date on which you are canceling. You'll need this information if you continue to get billed.

Cancel at the Right Time

The time of month you choose to cancel your service will also determine whether you receive unwanted bills. Billing cycles are often set by the date you signed up (say from the 14th to the 14th). Since services generally bill for basic services one month in advance, to avoid additional charges you should cancel your service no less than one week before the next billing cycle begins. According to AOL customer service, basic charges are not refundable, and cancellation requests made within the last 72 hours of the billing month may be processed after basic billing takes place.

Get Help from Your Credit Card Company

If you don't have any luck canceling your account on your own, start a formal dispute procedure via your credit card company. For example, Visa will accept disputes sent by mail with a copy of your credit card statement, your name and account number, the amount of the disputed charge, and a de-

scription of the problem, with the steps you have taken with the online service to fix it. Be sure to send dated copies of any correspondence between yourself and the online service, as well as the names of any service representatives you've spoken with.



Visa will then work with the online service on your behalf to fix the error. There's no guarantee that the credit card company will find in your favor, but you will not have to pay while your bill is in dispute.

half to fix the error. There's no guarantee that the credit card company will find in your favor, but you will not have to pay while your bill is in dispute.

If All Else Fails, Cancel Your Credit Card

If sincere attempts to resolve the dispute through your credit card company are ineffective, canceling your card is a drastic but effective option. Vendors who charge your old credit card will be notified that the card is no longer valid, and you will be responsible only for charges made prior to cancellation.

EDITED BY DEBORAH BRANSCUM

The True Cost of TAXES

Can your computer really save you money at tax time?

AT BEST, doing your taxes is a lousy way to spend a weekend. At worst, it can be nerve-racking. Publishers of tax preparation software promise to relieve those anxieties by guiding you through the process of preparing your return. Implicit, too, is the promise that the tax package will save you money.

The surest way to put computerized taxes to the economic test is with your own num-

bers. Here's what you need to know to calculate the true cost of tax preparation for your family:

⑥ **Software costs.** Tax preparation packages range in price from about \$20 (Parson's Personal Tax Edge, for Windows) to around \$50 (TurboTax, for Windows, and MacInTax, for the Mac). In the middle is TaxCut (Mac and Windows), priced at \$40.

⑥ **Mail or e-mail?** The three most popular programs let you file your return electronically. The advantage? You receive a refund about three weeks faster than if you file the traditional way. But electronic filing costs \$10 per return.

⑥ **Do-it-yourself versus professional preparation.** Are you planning to replace a professional preparer? Or are you simply

imply 4 hours over filling out a paper return. Remember, though, that most of the time you spend doing your taxes isn't with the forms — or the software — but in collecting the information you need to enter. Which leads us to...

Save even more time. If you've used a personal finance program like Quicken or Microsoft Money during the year, put yourself on the back. You can extract almost all the data to create a return in just minutes or by importing the data directly into the tax package.

How much time you save overall depends on how complex your tax situation is and how knowledgeable you are. (Software is most helpful to those who don't know the rules.) Based on our research, we think a conservative estimate is 4 hours if you've never used a personal finance program, 2 hours if you use the program to prepare, review, and

or the value of your time at home — even at minimum 6 hours are worth over 10 times over of computerizing your taxes, considerably lower than the cost by hand.



TAX MYTHS

Three common myths about computerized taxes

⑥ **Preparers have a software edge.** In many cases, tax preparers use pretty much the same software you do. TurboTax Professional (up to \$3800) uses the same basic technology and software engine as the \$50 program you can buy at the store. The big difference is the number of forms and schedules.

⑥ **You'll get a bigger refund.** Not neces-

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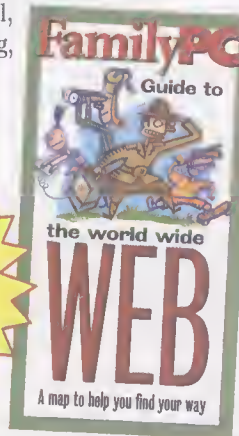
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The True Cost of TAXES

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⑥ **Do-it-yourself versus professional preparation.** Are you planning to replace a professional preparer? Or are you simply substituting the computer for pencil and paper? If you're planning to go it alone, factor in any fees you've paid in the past.

To compute the direct cost of doing taxes on the computer, use this simple formula: cost of software + electronic filing fee - preparation fee = total cost. If, for instance, you buy TurboTax to replace a preparer who last year charged you \$150, and you're planning to file by mail rather than electronically, your cost will be $\$50 + \$0 - \$150 = -\100 (or a savings of \$100). On the other hand, if you purchase TaxCut and mail the return but you've always done your taxes on your own, your cost will be $\$40 + \$0 - \$0 = \40 .

Time Counts

Computerized tax preparation appears to be a time-saver for many people. In one survey, TurboTax users who last year completed Form 1040 reported saving approx-

imately 4 hours over filling out a paper return. Remember, though, that most of the time you spend doing your taxes isn't with the forms — or the software — but in collecting the information you need to enter. Which leads us to...

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How much time you save overall depends on how fast you can collect the information, how complex your tax situation is, and how knowledgeable you are. (Software is most helpful to those who don't know much about taxes.) Based on our own experience, we think a conservative estimate of time saved is 4 hours if you've tracked most expenses with a personal finance program, plus 2 hours if you use the computer to actually prepare, review, and print the return.

Don't forget to factor the value of your time into the tax cost equation — even at minimum wage rates, those 6 hours are worth over \$30. So the true cost of computerizing your taxes is most likely considerably lower than continuing to do them by hand.



TAX MYTHS

Three common myths about computerized taxes

⑥ **Preparers have a software edge.** In many cases, tax preparers use pretty much the same software you do. TurboTax Professional (up to \$3800) uses the same basic technology and software engine as the \$50 program you can buy at the store. The big difference is the number of forms and schedules.

⑥ **You'll get a bigger refund.** Not necessarily. These programs interpret the tax laws relatively rigidly. And although their Q&A interviews are thorough, the software may not catch omissions. If you forget to enter your mortgage interest deduction during the interview, the review audit probably won't notice. That, of course, has an impact on the amount you'll pay.

⑥ **Tax software is infallible.** No, it's not. Program bugs have made news in both the last two years. So can you trust a return generated by these packages? Generally, the answer is yes. Any bug is significant when you're talking taxes, but the most recent have been within forms or calculations used by only a small percentage of taxpayers. An additional safety net is the guarantee given by publishers that they'll pay any IRS-imposed penalties that result from errors on the part of the program.



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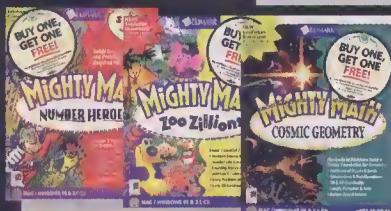
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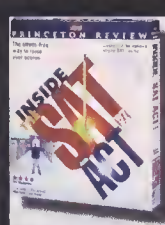
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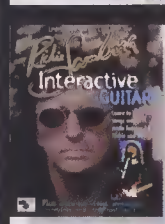
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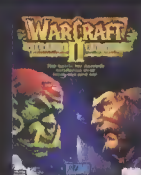
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FOR KIDS

THE KIDS' COMPUTER MAGAZINE

SPACE CASES

Former Power Ranger
Walter Jones enters a new universe on *Space Cases*

Name: Walter Jones

Best Known As: The original Black Ranger from *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* and now as Harlan Band from *Space Cases*.

Hobbies: Martial arts and dancing

Hometown: Detroit, Michigan. He now lives in Los Angeles, California.

Computations: I use my computer to keep track of the phone numbers and addresses of everyone I know. I also use it to send and receive faxes, for drawing pictures, and for playing games.

Favorite game: Doom and Doom II are my all-time favorites. I've also gotten into MechWarrior 2. I really love the futuristic graphics and those three-dimensional robot creatures that you get to control in the game.

Computer glitches: When I was in Montreal, Canada, filming an episode of *Space Cases*, I was using my com-

puter, and a disk got stuck inside the computer's disk drive. I didn't know what to do. I thought I broke my whole computer. I totally freaked out, but it turned out that it was just a defective disk. After some tinkering, I was able to get the disk out. It turns out that the little



metal piece on the disk itself was bent, and that's what caused it to get stuck.

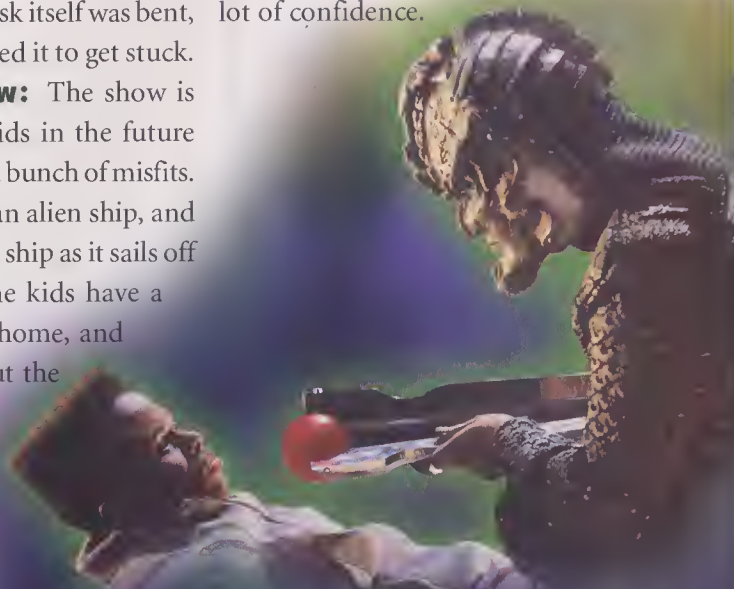
Space Cases crew: The show is about a group of kids in the future who are considered a bunch of misfits. They sneak aboard an alien ship, and they get stuck on the ship as it sails off into space. Now, the kids have a seven-year journey home, and the series is all about the adventures they experience.

Star gazing: I really enjoyed working with

George Takei (Sulu from the original *Star Trek* series) and Mark Hamill (Luke Skywalker from the *Star Wars* trilogy).

Sci-fi for kids: Our show is different from other science-fiction shows like *Babylon 5* or *Star Trek*. Everything that happens as far as the operation of the ship we are on is done by young people. The kids are in charge and the adults are the passengers.

Martial smarts: One of the reasons I got my role on *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* was because I had been studying the martial arts for more than 10 years. On *Space Cases*, however, there isn't really a need for it. Still, it has taught me self-control and self-reliance and has also given me a lot of confidence.



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Drive: Off-Road. For more

on **alternative** rock,

plug in this URL.

* www.7thlevel.com.

Scott Page, former **sax**

player, and cofounder of the

game **company** 7th

Level, used to play in the

band **Pink Floyd**.

* www.kmix106.com/

The group **Severe**

Tire Damage performed the

first **rock** show on the

Internet on November 18,

1994. For a fun **music**

trivia game, tune in this site.

TECHNO *Tu-Tu*

Here's a hot mix of computerized choreography happening down in Atlanta called the Dance Technology Project. The project is a partnership between the Atlanta Ballet and the Georgia Institute of Technology. Dancers are wired to sensors. As they perform, tracking devices capture the movements to create animated figures on a computer. These virtual dancers are projected onto large screens behind the performers. As the dancers twirl, the images change, too, driven by the computer. Engineers are also using special cameras to track hot spots on props and costumes. As the signals are picked up, the information is sent to computers, which draw a quick picture. The new picture is flashed onto the moving dancer, creating a virtual costume. Eventually, they hope to change a dancer's costumes in real time through this projected computer animation. Ta-ta tu-tu.



BODY *Electric*

Someday, computer scientists like Chris Johnson may help save your life

Hundreds of times each second, your brain sends electrical waves racing through your body's web of nerve cells. These signals provide important information about the way your heart and brain works. Doctors are unable to map all these currents because they would have to stick thousands of needles inside you at different depths. **OUCH!**

Enter Chris Johnson, computer scientist at the University of Utah. His computer modeling programs, which use 3-D graphics and math formulas, are helping doctors to

map the entire body. "We use computers to map the electrical activity to provide more specific information much earlier in the process,"

Johnson told *FamilyPC* for Kids. Eventually, he says, these computer models will be used to prevent heart attacks and pinpoint the location of seizures within the brain.

"That's our goal, and with the help of these more sophisticated computers, we're getting there."

For a not so life-and-death serious look at the wonders of science, check out the Web sites hovering around this article.



Neoscience Institute www.gl.umbc.edu/~etofon1/neosci/home.htm

Ask Dr. Science www.ducksbreath.com/

Dr. Internet www.ipl.org/youth/DrInternet

MAUI MALLARD in COLD SHADOW

BY ELI DWIGHT,
AGE 10,
OF MASSACHUSETTS



Score: 85

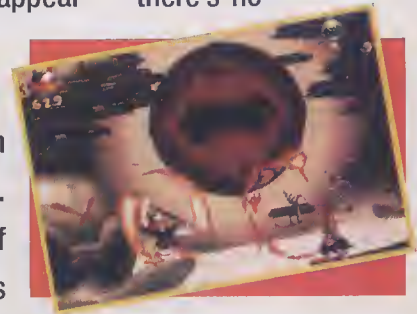
Maui Mallard in Cold Shadow is a game with this duck who can transform into a Ninja. It's easy to set up. Graphics and the action are similar to what you would find on a Sega Genesis.

Maui Mallard is a good duck trying to save the island Maui, which is in trouble since its leader disappeared. In the first level you're a regular old duck, and you go into a mansion, and you have a weird bug gun and wear a Hawaiian shirt, and you shoot crea-

tures and alligators, except you don't shoot bugs — you collect them for better ammo for your weapons (green blobs, bananas, jacks). When you shoot things, they just disappear — there's no blood. You collect ammo, coins, and punch. The punch restores your health.

There are lots of secret passageways

where you hop onto hidden chains and climb to a place where there's lots of ammo. You have to collect enough coins to morph into a Ninja. Once you do, you can jump higher and get around easier.



Q&A MAUI MALLARD

Q: When you morph into a Ninja warrior, how do you see, since there's a red headband across your eyes?

A: As a Ninja warrior, my senses are so finely tuned that I don't need sight to perceive my surroundings. Besides, ever smelled a Muddrake? Whew! You don't need eyes to know they're around.

Q: Rumor has it you got dumped by your girlfriend prior to coming to the island. Are you over her yet?

A: Of course I'm over her. (Ahem!) I mean, sure I miss her, but that's the past. Uh, do you have a handkerchief? I have a little dust in my eyes.



Thank you. (Maui now sobs uncontrollably into the handkerchief, wrings it out, and hands it back.) So anyway, I'm totally over her. Barely remember her name.

Q: What's the coolest thing about being a detective?

A: The exotic locales, the interesting people. Of course, some of the "locales" are the insides of active volcanoes, and some of the "people" are shambling Duck Zombies, but I consider those an occupational hazard.

Q: What's your favorite place on the island?

A: By far it would be the

Ninja Training Grounds. I'd have to say that I find battling a Ninja clone or two very relaxing.

Q: What's the scariest place on the island (and why)?

A: The Mojo Mansion. That creepy butler, the mysterious faces, vicious piranha. And those sinus spirits. Even if they miss, you can still slip and fall on the goop they spit at you.

Q: Do you ever change that ugly flower-print shirt?

A: You mean my favorite shirt? The shirt *she* bought for me? How about if I introduce you to the business end of my Bug Gun. Next question!

Q: What's next for Maui Mallard?

A: I expect fame, fortune, maybe a date with an Amazon Warrior.

GIGABRAIN'S Goofy COMPUTER TRICKS

WACKY WALLPAPER

How would you like to emblazen your desktop with a tattoo that flaunts your undying loyalty to the platform of your choice? We put together images from the Web page Windows 95 & Mac Joke Wallpaper for you to download. There's the "I Love Win 95" heart tattoo, the "Mac Ma-



rauder" skull and crossbones, and the "World Wide Web Wanderer" rose tattoo. Other images include "Mac OS R.I.P.," "Where do you want to go today? Wherever Mr. Gates wants us to," and a Windows button saying "Start spending

money" and "It's now safe to turn off your brain."

To get the images, go to FamilyPC@aol.com or www

.familypc.com. If you have a Mac, use TIFF files; if you have Windows, use bit-map (BMP) files. In Windows, put your cursor on the desktop. Click and hold your right mouse button. From the pop-up menu, choose Properties. Choose the tab labeled Background. Use the Browse option to find the bit-map graphic you saved. Click on OK, and now it's your wallpaper. For

Macs, cut and paste your file into your Desktop Patterns file in the Control Panel. And if your folks ask you to help out around the house, tell them, "I just finished putting up some new wallpaper."



.....HAPPENINGS

Where it's At: Word Ware

What it's NOT:

What it IS:

Link Rot

A half-eaten hot dog left on a plate that got pushed under your bed.

When Web page links die as the sites they're connected to change location.

Under Mouse Arrest

When you get stuck taking your younger brother on the lame kiddie rides at Walt Disney World.

Getting busted for violating an online service's rule of conduct. "AOL put me under mouse arrest for scrolling."

404

The number of levels in the latest computer game you can't master.

Someone who's clueless. From the Web message "404, URL Not Found."

Keyboard Plaque

A keyboard hanging on the wall above your desk.

The disgusting buildup of crud found on computer keyboards.

Bookmark

The folded corner of the page containing the best scene of your favorite comic book.

To take note of a person for future reference. "I bookmarked him after seeing his cool pinball technique at the arcade."

Send your computer-related slang and phrases to Michelle_Megna@zd.com, unless you're 404, man.

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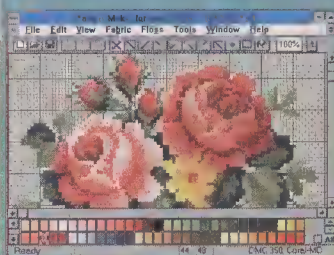
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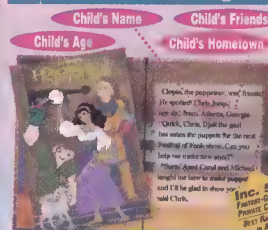
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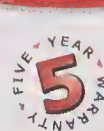
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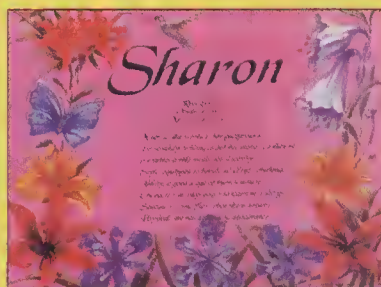
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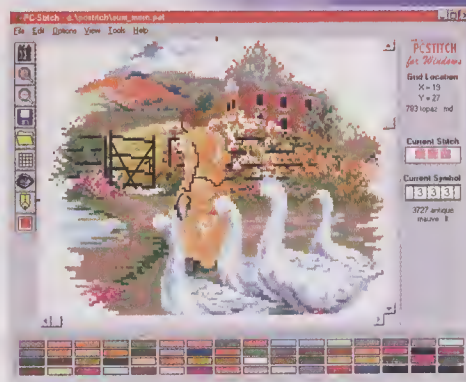
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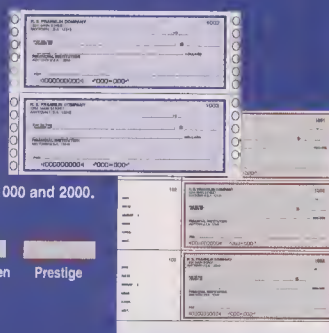
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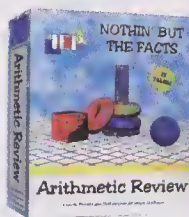
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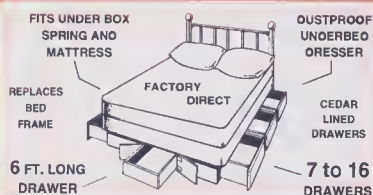
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MUSINGS



BY DAN MUSE

It's OK to Be FUN

AFTER 15 YEARS, COMES A REVELATION

I RECENTLY CALCULATED that I have spent about 40 percent of my life in the computer-magazine publishing field. The work has always been fun, but what hasn't always been fun is the kids' software.

Ten years ago, we told ourselves software had to have inherent educational value to be worthwhile. Why did we say that? Because we knew the software wasn't fun. Maybe compared to flash cards and spelling lists it was mildly entertaining. But could it compete with other entertainments fighting for your kids' attention, such as television or movies? Of course not. With primitive graphics, little or no sound, and limited interactivity, how much fun could software be?

Today it's different. With movie-quality sound and graphics, it's easier to make

software that is simply fun. But we still hold on to that notion that good software has to have educational value. And it's not fair: We're holding software to standards we don't hold other media to. I know I don't spend hours thinking about how kids are improving their core learning skills while they are watching *The Lion King*. I don't balk because the children's books we buy don't have word puzzles and logic games interspersed among the pages. I don't write to the manufacturer because the Etch-a-Sketch we bought didn't come with a parent's guide.

So, here's the revelation: It's OK for software to be just plain fun. If kids learn something, that's great. And if your child needs or wants to focus on some curriculum area like math or reading, you won't

find a more able aid than your family computer and today's educational software. But all kids need time to play — and today's breed of software is more fun than television, videotapes, and many other indoor activities. Of course the best way for kids to have fun is to go outside and play baseball or ride a bike. But sometimes it rains, and it always gets dark at night. On those inevitable occasions, playing on the computer — just playing — is fine with me.

I guess the combination of caring deeply about our kids, wanting to do the right thing as parents, and wanting to justify a large expense sometimes forces us to look at software with a pedantic eye. If you have someone who questions the value of the software you buy, I have a catchall, face-saving response: I just say, "It improves logical-thinking skills." And it's no lie — what's more logical than wanting to have fun?

Dan Muse is the editor of *FamilyPC*. E-mail him at daniel_muse@zd.com.

PHOTOGRAPH: ED JUDICE

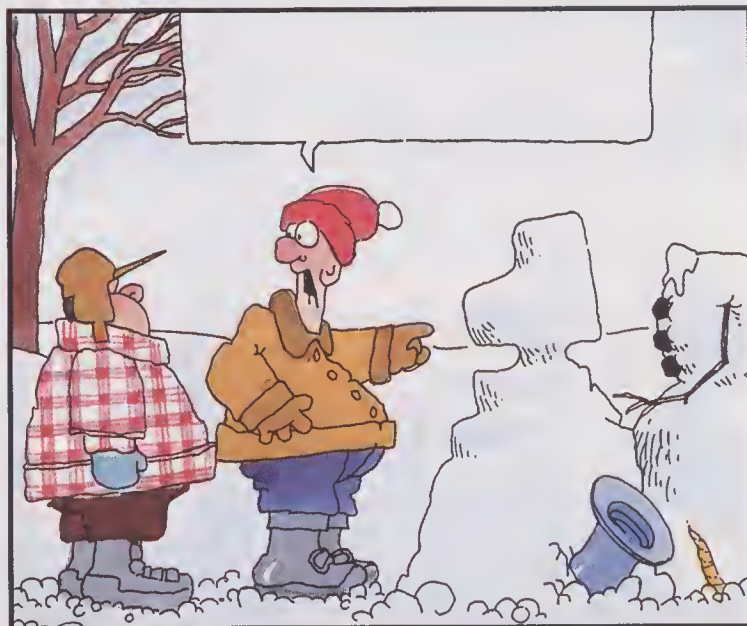
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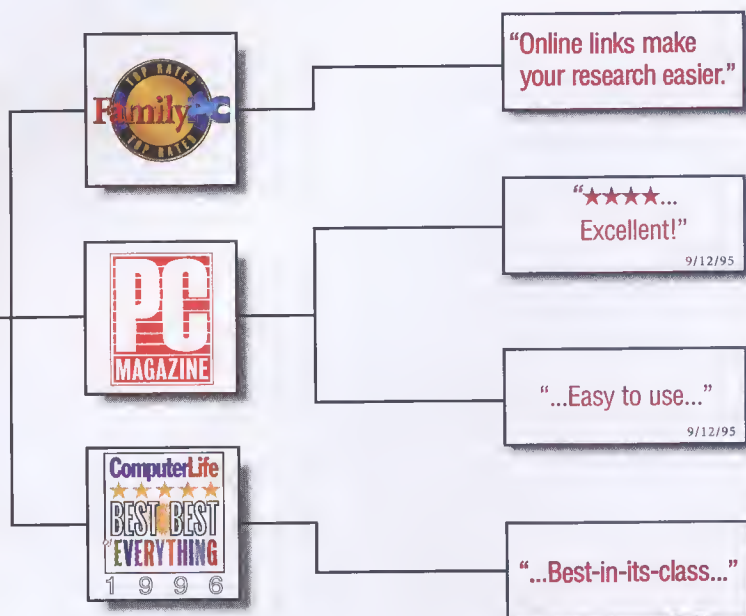
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